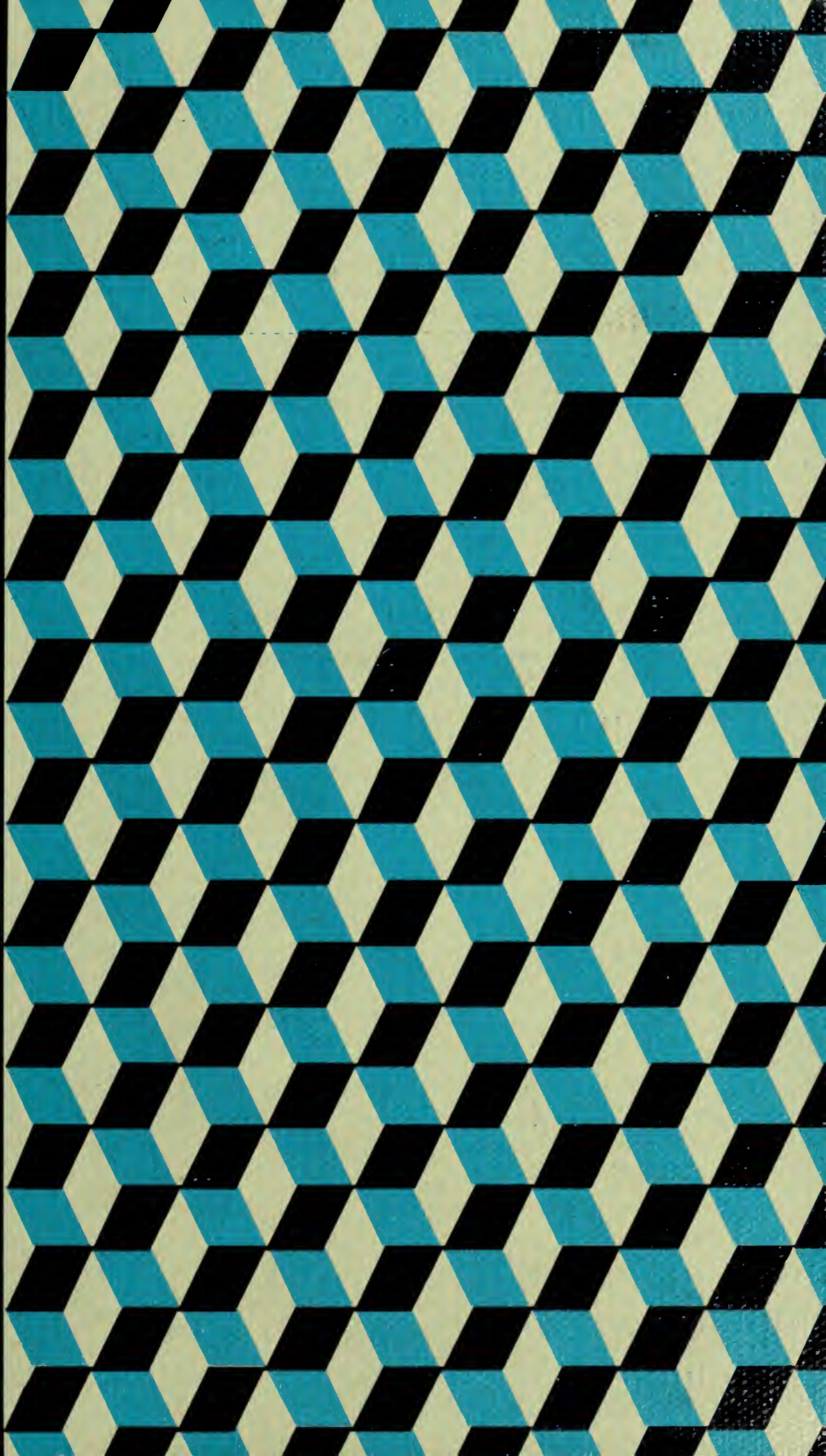

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A TREASURY OF PLAYS FOR MEN

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By Frank Shay

Plays and Books of the Little Theatre
The Bibliography of Walt Whitman
Iron Men and Wooden Ships
Contemporary One-act Plays, 1921–1922
Ten One-act Comedies
1001 Plays for Little Theatres
A Treasury of Plays for Women
A Treasury of Plays for Men
On Organizing a Little Theatre

With George Cram Cook

The Provincetown Plays

With Pierre Loving

Fifty Contemporary One-act Plays

A TREASURY OF PLAYS FOR MEN

EDITED BY

FRANK SHAY

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1923

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FOREWORD

The present collection of one-act plays is planned as a companion volume to "A Treasury of Plays for Women." The conditions and difficulties of preparation were much the same and the result is analogous. One cannot desexualize the drama and feel that he has contributed to its welfare. The two collections fill definite needs and as such were compiled. The strongest declaration to be made in their favor is that it is the earnest belief of the Editor to be the best each field affords. If women's clubs and men's clubs desire material which will help them make an evening or a series of evenings more enjoyable and attractive, they will find such material here.

The erudite Webster, in the latest edition of his wordy tome, defines an anthology as "a collection of the flowers of literature." I make no such claim for this anthology. It is, last of all things, a garland of plays. Its only claim to distinction is that it will fill a need among organizations composed of men, though women may be admitted to the performances. There is nothing in the book to offend the most delicate sense of what is proper. In one or two instances men kill, or die, or are killed, but your modern lady is used to such affairs and does not wink an eye.

The greatest difficulty experienced was securing plays requiring men to cast which were not war or crook dramas. In the first list there were no less than eleven of the former and seven of the latter. Plays of this type were so common it was early decided to reduce them in quantity and elevate them in quality, and seek plays by authors who did not think that men, when alone, were always fighting or breaking penal codes. In the examples of these types included I think

I have secured the best. Crooks do have problems all their own and warriors have conflicts that do not always involve the enemy. The other plays in the volume will provide a fare more various than the conventional.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the gracious help in compiling this volume of Miss Bernice Lesbia Kenyon, Miss Jane Dransfield, Miss Abigail Marshall, Mrs. Sarah Jefferis Curry, Louise Bryant Reed, Colin Campbell Clements, Frank G. Tompkins, Thomas Wood Stevens, Winthrop Parkhurst, Holland Hudson, Edward H. Smith, Dhan Gopal Mukerji, Pierre Loving, Carl Glick, Alfred Kreymborg, Ben Hecht, Eugene Pillot, and Howard Forman Smith, for permission to include examples of their work. To Jean Wick, Thomas Wood Stevens, and Norman Lee Swartout thanks are also due for many helpful suggestions.

F. S.

PROVINCETOWN, MASS.,
June 1, 1923

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A TREASURY OF PLAYS FOR MEN

FOUR WHO WERE BLIND

COLIN CAMPBELL CLEMENTS

Colin Campbell Clements is a modest young man who refuses to divulge the date and place of his birth. He was until a few years ago a worker with the American Relief Committee in the Near East. While there he collaborated with Queen Marie on several plays. Until last year he was connected with Professor George Pierce Baker at the "47 Workshop." He is the author of "Plays for a Folding Theatre," published by Stewart Kidd.

FOUR WHO WERE BLIND

A SATIRICAL FANTASY

By COLIN CAMPBELL CLEMENTS

TO J. M. K. OF THE
ABBEY THEATRE

Characters

KEVORK	An Armenian
TOFFY, RED	British Tommies
M. P.	A Sergeant in the British Army
THE STRANGER	

NOTE: The play takes place sometime during General Allenby's occupation of Palestine.

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Applications for permission to produce "Four Who Were Blind" should be addressed to the Dramatists' Play Agency, 213 West 42nd Street, New York. No performance may be given without its consent.

FOUR WHO WERE BLIND

SCENE. *The interior of a coffee house in Jerusalem. It is a squalid, dirty room lighted by a single kerosene lamp, with a large, fly-specked shade, which hangs directly over a small round table at the right. At the left (of the audience) is a bar with coffee things upon it and behind it a shelf piled with cigarettes, ginger ale and dirty playing cards. In front of the bar is a door leading into the street; another door at the back opens into the living quarters of the shop; at the right is a long, low window with several stools pushed up against the wall underneath.*

Kevork, a slovenly little Armenian with a head which seems to be flattened at the back, is mechanically mopping off the bar with a fat, pudgy hand covered with cheap jewelry. He is dressed in a long blue apron tied about the waist with a wide sash; a red fez, greasy and unpressed, balances itself over his left eye. Near him, on the floor, is a pair of wide red slippers with thick soles, into which Kevork slips his bare feet when waiting upon customers. Near the table at the right sits Toffy, a round-shouldered, flat-chested young man with a callow face graced by a straggly blond moustache which hangs down over his uneven, dirty teeth; from one corner of his small mouth dangles a limp cigarette which from time to time drops its ashes down over the front of his khaki shirt. The rest of this young man's uniform consists of a cap, several sizes too large for him, a pair of short breeches which leave his knotty knees uncovered, yellow woollen spiral puttees, and heavy boots.

When the curtain rises Toffy is heard singing in a shrill, nasal voice:

TOFFY. "Baby dear, did yer 'ear, they's been a rober-rey in the park . . ." (*He looks over at Kevork*) W'at the 'ell? Gawd blimey, if this place ain't like a bleedin' tomb. Gawd

blimey, if th' w'ole town ain't like a bleedin' tomb. Nobody abaht. (*Kevork goes on with his work without looking up. Toffy throws his cigarette on the floor, steps on it, yawns and stretches himself*) W'at's a bloke t' do wiv 'is ev'nin's? W'y in 'ell don't yer 'ave somefin t' drink abaht this 'ere 'ole, Kevork?

KEVORK (*he shrugs his shoulders, does not look up*). Eet ees orders. G. H. Q. day behint yesterday . . . maybe de day before dat. No drinks allowed for soldeers.

TOFFY. Army's puttin' th' blink on this bloomin' country . . . w'at good is it any'ow? Stinkin' 'ole, never will be any bloody good t' anybody. (*After making a thorough search through his pockets for a cigarette he shakes his head sadly*) Gi' me some cigarettes, Kevork.

KEVORK (*he stops his mopping suddenly*). You wan' *T'ree Cestles . . . Bleck Cets . . . ?*

TOFFY. Naw, gi' me Reggies. (*Recklessly*) Arf a bob's worth.

KEVORK. Yes, Effendi.

TOFFY (*he saunters over to the bar, leans far across and half whispers into Kevork's ear*). Yer sure yer ain't got a little w'iskey 'idin' abaht somew'ere?

KEVORK (*he shakes his head sadly*). No, Effendi. If dey fin' weeskey dey burn house, maybe.

TOFFY. W'ere's the 'arm o' 'avin' a little drink abaht?

KEVORK. Army orders . . . no drinks. I 'frait. Ver' sat . . . ver' sat.

TOFFY. Bloody ol' fool! W'o's goin' t' 'arm yer?

KEVORK. Soldiers, dey come . . .

TOFFY. Aw, 'ell. (*He takes up his cigarettes, pockets them, and starts back to the table singing*) "Hit's a lovely, lovely war . . . a lovely, lovely war . . ." (*He pulls out his chair and sinks into it*) Like 'ell it is . . . like 'ell. Nothin' t' drink . . . nobody allowed down on the line but horfficers . . . 'n' th' Y.M.C.A.'s 'ad th' same bleedin' pi'ture fer three weeks. Jerusalem th' golden! Them blokes w'at calls it that ain't been 'ere lately! (*Dis-*

consolately he takes out a cigarette and lights it) Say, yer goin' t' scrub that 'ere bar all night? Gawd, yer fair give a bloke th' creeps wiv yer scrubbin' 'n' scrubbin' 'n' scrubbin' . . .

KEVORK. Eet is ver' dirty, Effendi.

TOFFY. 'Ell; everyfing's dirty down 'ere . . . an' they calls it th' 'Oly Land!

[*The door at the left is pushed open and a big red-haired, red-faced Irishman stalks into the room. He is wearing an ill fitting uniform not unlike Toffy's with the exception of his trousers, which are long.*

RED. Well . . . Well, Kevork—

TOFFY. 'Ullo, Red.

RED (*he blinks for a moment then starts toward the table at the right*). Is ut you, Toffy?

TOFFY. Ho, yus. What are yer doin' abaht?

RED (*he grunts*). Seein' th' sights, I am.

TOFFY (*with an amused twinkle in his eye*). Yer've been to th' Church o' th' 'Oly Sepulcher again?

RED (*he nods*). I have that. Sure an' a prayer said in all riverence now an' thin won't hurt th' best av us.

TOFFY. Pretendin' you're a bleedin' angel, I s'pose?

RED (*he moves a chair up to the table and sits down; sighs*). It's dying I am to get out av this place. 'Twas me auld mither told me long ago that if ye pray long enough and hard enough your prayer is sure t' be answered.

TOFFY. Yus?

RED (*he knocks the ashes from his pipe and puts it into his pocket*). An' ut's tryin' me luck I am. I'm wishin' t' be back in Donegal or as far as Dublin, maybe, this very night.

TOFFY (*pathetically*). 'S a 'ell of a long way 'ome, Red.

RED (*bitterly*). Solderin' is no job fer a man that has a heart in himself at all . . . and me down twice with the faver since th' day we landed, long, long ago, at Joffa. It's wearin' out me heart I am . . . and th' seat av me breeches, sittin' around waitin' for th' word to move on.

But it's not loikely we'll be movin' for th' next foive years, an' maybe longer.

TOFFY (*he shifts in his chair restlessly*). Gawd blimey, I'm achin' fer t' 'ave a shot at ol' Johnny Turk.

RED. 'Tis not loikely you'll get wan. 'Twas fer fightin' they signed us up an' 'tis to clean th' dhirty streets they've set us.

[*Outside the muezzin is heard calling the evening prayer. The two men sit silently listening to the mournful call: "La-ilaha-illa-'llahu; Muhammadu-Rasulu-'allah."*

TOFFY. Bloody 'eathen's callin' fer prayer.

RED (*nervously*). 'Tis loike th' banshee schreechin'. (*He pounds on the table*) Here, Kevork, what have ye fit fer a soldier to drink?

KEVORK. Coffee an' geenger beer, Effendi.

RED. Ginger beer, is ut! Saints in Hiven! D'ye call that a proper drink fer a soldier?

KEVORK (*he moves round to the front of the bar*). Eet's de law.

RED. Divil av a law is there in this no-man's-land. (*He winks knowingly*) Come now, two whiskeys, two *Irish* whiskeys fer two foine gentlemen av th' King's army.

KEVORK (*he shakes his head sadly*). De law says —

RED. T' hell with th' laws!

TOFFY. I'm that bloody dry!

RED. Amin t' that. (*He turns to Kevork again*) Come along, sure we're agin that law as much as yourself. Now fer two stidy customers loike ourselves here —

KEVORK. No drink in my house, Effendi. Soldiers say no, I say no!

TOFFY. Did yer ever see a blarsted Armenian w'o would part wiv anyfing?

RED (*he jumps to his feet and taking Kevork by the shoulder shakes him*). God stiffen ye — come through!

KEVORK (*groveling*). Geenger beer an' coffee . . . eet ees all what I got, Effendi . . . all what I got. (*He rubs the palms of his hands together*) Not'ink more . . . coffee . . . geenger beer.

RED. Aw, make ut a couple o' pints av ginger beer. (*He walks back to the table and slams down a sovereign*) An' make ut dam' quick.

KEVORK. Queek . . . queek . . . yes, Effendi.

[*But Kevork is not used to moving quickly and his feet seem to get in his own way.*

RED. Not bein' contint with dumpin' us in this hell av a place they up and takes our rightful drink from us. Is ut they're wishin' t' make camels av us?

TOFFY. Or Mo-'am-me-dans? (*He leans back and sings*)

"Ho, it's th' rich w'at gits th' profits,
An' th' pore w'at gits th' blime . . .
Ain't it a bleedin' shime?"

KEVORK. Effendi.

[*He moves over to the table and puts down a jug of ginger ale and several cups.*

RED (*he looks at the jug sadly*). A foine drink ut is fer a man t' be puttin' into his guts.

TOFFY. Gawd strike 'im blind!

KEVORK. Yes, Effendi.

RED (*he pushes the coin toward Kevork*). Mind ye give back th' change av this; none av your monkey-shines, me bye.

TOFFY (*he winks*). This is a 'onest place, this is.

RED. Is ut now? Since whin?

KEVORK. Yes, Effendi.

[*He takes up the coin and shuffles away to the bar.*

RED (*he fills the cups and pushes one toward Toffy*). There ye are, me bye.

TOFFY. Cheero! Cheero!

RED. A toast fer ye. (*He holds up his cup mockingly*) Here's t' th' lime juice guzzlin' army, may God sind us back to Blighty soon.

TOFFY. Righto!

[*Kevork returns to the table, lays down Red's change, and moves away to the window at the right.*

RED (*disgustedly and with a sour face he puts down his cup*). 'Tis loike drinkin' th' dhirty water av Solomon's pool!

TOFFY. An' th' same smell!

RED (*he glances over at Kevork, lowers his voice*). Kevork is actin' quear loike this night. Have ye noticed? Him what usually talks all th' toime has said hardly a word to us, th' evenin'. 'Tis loike he has somethin' on his moind.

TOFFY. 'E's a funny bird fer yer, a funny bird. Arf balmy!

RED (*he chuckles to himself, calls*). Is ut in love ye are, Kevork?

KEVORK (*he does not turn away from the window*). Love, Effendi? (*He shakes his head*) No-o-o.

RED (*good-naturedly*). You're lookin' so wistful loike, I thought perhaps —

TOFFY. Gawd pity th' gel that would be 'ooked up wiv 'im!

RED. Is ut expectin' somebody, ye are?

KEVORK. Yes —

TOFFY. Wishin' t' Gawd fer a few customers.

KEVORK (*he moves toward the table*). No — a stranger, a stranger man.

RED. A stranger is ut? Surely ut's a dark night this night. Jerusalem is no place fer strangers at all.

KEVORK. Yes, Effendi. (*A worried look comes into his face, he bites his lower lip, shakes his head*) He sait he woult come to dees place at suntown. De sun gone!

RED. Is ut owin' ye money he is?

KEVORK. No; he pait for dees night's lodgink.

TOFFY. 'Is money an' a clean bed — w'at yer got t' complain abaht?

KEVORK. I weesh he come beck.

RED. What manner av a man was he?

KEVORK. A ver' strange man, Effendi. (*He shakes his head*) No man have ever been like heem.

RED. No? What kind of a face had he?

KEVORK. Hees eyes were ver' kint, Effendi . . . der was a light around heem!

RED (*he leans forward*). A light?

KEVORK (*now trembling with excitement*). Almos' like de

light in de church at Easter time. Eet was here, 'round hees heat!

TOFFY. 'Ad a light on 'is 'ead, 'ad 'e? (*He sticks his hands deep into his pockets and stretches out his legs*) Gawd, the bloke's orf 'is nut, Red. Bloody ol' fool!

RED (*he is very much interested*). Was ut a uneform he was wearin', Kevork?

KEVORK. No, Effendi. On hees back was a lonk black cloak and —

TOFFY (*he sits up and blinks his eyes*). Rooshun!

RED (*he shakes his head*). Comin' to pray at th' holy places. Well, 'tis no safe place fer Rooshuns with th' British in occupation.

TOFFY. Th' bloody M. P's 'll 'ave 'im afore th' night's arf out.

KEVORK. But he ees not a bat man!

RED. Rooshuns an' th' loike are not wanted here now. Sure ain't th' Arabs and th' Jews and th' Turks enough without bringin' in th' lousy Rooshuns?

KEVORK. But dey say — to-day — dees afternoon, near de *Beit el Mukdas*, dees stranger make a leetle chil' to see again, an' rais' a man what was deat!

TOFFY. A bloody ghost raiser!

RED (*knowingly*). Or a Bolshevik more thin loikely.

TOFFY (*with a wave of his hand*). Gowan! Yer fair give a bloke th' creeps wiv yer talk. Me 'air's all on edge.

KEVORK (*he turns and walks slowly toward the bar at the left*). I weesh he woult come again . . . I weesh —

TOFFY. Raisin' th' dead! Gawd blimey, these Armenians get queer ideas.

RED. 'Tis a superstitious lot they are . . . th' whole av thim, belavin' everything they're told.

[*The street door is thrown open. The men start up in surprise. A broad-shouldered, square-faced Scotch M. P. stands on the threshold. He is a tall, gaunt individual over whose sharp bones a wrinkled brown skin clings tightly; above his collar protrudes an enormous Adam's apple which moves up and down when he speaks.*

THE M. P. Say —

KEVORK. Yes, Effendi . . . y-e-s, Effendi.

THE M. P. D'you want me to br-reak m' neck! There's noo licht above your-r door-r and it's a dar-rk nicht, this nicht. It's bod, mon, bod.

KEVORK. Yes, Effendi.

[*He runs to the bar, takes out a small tin lantern, lights it and goes out left.*

THE M. P. (*he walks to the table at the right*). Ho-ho, me lads.

RED. Good evenin' to ye, Sergeant.

THE M. P. Your-re enjoyin' your-rsel'es, na doot? (*He picks up the jug, smells it, and puts it down with some disappointment*) Ginger-r beer-r!

RED. Is ut suspectin' us ye are?

THE M. P. That's me job, mon.

TOFFY. 'Ell!

RED. I'm thinkin' a little drink now and thin can be hurtin' no man at all.

THE M. P. Richt you ar-re ther-re, but —

RED. And our wan enjoymint in this God-forsaken country has been taken from us!

THE M. P. Order-rs fr-rom G. H. Q. The guar-rd house is full to the br-rim with dr-runks.

TOFFY. T' 'ell with —

[*He thinks better of it and swallows the rest of his sentence with a gulp of ginger ale.*

RED. Where's th' harm in a bit av a drink?

THE M. P. If y' could all stop with a wee dr-rop . . . but noo. Ther-re's the r-rub! The whole damned ar-rmy has been dr-runk for-r a for-rtnicht — but noo moor-re.

RED. Is ut fightin' they're expectin' us t' do on ginger beer? (*He turns away disgustedly*) 'Tis no drink at all fer a dacent, self-respectin' gintleman t' be puttin' into himself.

THE M. P. (*he turns toward the door*). Or-rders is or-rders in the ar-rmy and we'll have to be r-respectin' 'em.

TOFFY. "Ho — hit's a lovely, lovely war . . ." Ho, yus.

THE M. P. Good nicht to y', me lads.

[*He turns to go out. The Stranger enters; he is a tall, thin man with long, yellow hair and deep blue eyes. Kevork, who has taken his place behind the bar some few moments ago, runs out to the center of the room.*

KEVORK (*he bows low and points to the door at the back*). Effendi . . . Effendi, I have for you some foot put away, rice an' olives an' — come, here . . . dees way, Effendi, dees way.

[*The Stranger pauses a moment at the table, smiles, bows and passes out through the door at the back with Kevork tagging at his heels. Toffy sits up wide-eyed and amazed while Red starts as if to cross himself but lets his hand fall to his side. The M. P. takes several steps forward.*

THE M. P. (*glancing at Red suspiciously*). D' y' know 'im?

RED (*with his eyes still on the door at the back*). Niver have I seen th' loikes av 'm before this night.

THE M. P. (*doubtfully. He walks toward the door at the back*). I ha' me doots about the mon. I dinna like his looks.

TOFFY. 'E stays with Kevork 'ere.

THE M. P. Yes?

TOFFY (*laughs*). Kevork, 'e says th' bloke raised a man —

RED. Sh —

TOFFY. I ain't sayin' nofin'.

RED. 'Tis best t' only answer questions in th' army.

THE M. P. (*returning to center of room*). Stoppin' her-re, is he?

RED. Yes, fer th' night.

THE M. P. Just came?

TOFFY. Yus.

THE M. P. I'll keep an eye on the mon.

RED. Sure there's no reason t' be worryin' your head about that man. Did ye see th' eyes av him? Honest eyes, they was.

TOFFY (*he scratches the back of his head*). Like two bleedin' candles! My Gawd, 'e was like th' painted pi'tures yer sees in churches. 'E fair gives me th' creeps 'e does.

THE M. P. He may be har-rmless but ther-re's many a mon wi' the looks o' a saint who has the devil inside 'm. (*He*

turns on his heel; flings out over his shoulder as he passes out) Good nicht to y', me lads. Behave your-rsel's.

RED. What else would we be doin' av in this hole?

THE M. P. It's a good place to save your-r money in, noo wher-re t' spend it. Good nicht.

RED. Good night, Sergeant.

TOFFY (*he stretches his neck around to make sure the M. P. is out of hearing*). Bloody, blinkin' M. P's!

RED. Always snoopin' and sniffin' around, lookin' fer trouble instead av waitin' until trouble foinds them. Ah, well, I'm not wan t' be complainin'. (*He takes out his pipe and fills it*) Orders is orders, I s'pose, an' they got t' do their dooty.

TOFFY. W'at the 'ell they need t' be so pa'tic'lar now for? We done our bit wivout hollerin' abaht it and we bloody well got somefin comin' to us, ain't we? Damn the M. P's! (*He lights another cigarette, leans forward and spits*) Tell yer, Red, they's two things I don't like abaht army life — an' th' other one's cooteys.

RED. Sure ye can get rid av lice but not th' Police — (*he shakes his head*) niver! (*Kevork comes shuffling in from the room from the back*) Here, Kevork, fill her up again.

[*Holding up the jug.*

KEVORK. Yes, Effendi.

[*He takes up the jug and shuffles away to the bar.*

TOFFY (*laughing*). 'E ain't arf a toff wiv 'is silly old red bonnet, eh?

RED. And th' monkey face av him. He has th' look av a Scotch Highlander about him — an' as tight he is.

KEVORK (*he returns to the table with another jug of ginger ale*). Effendi.

RED (*putting his money on the table*). Here, me bye.

TOFFY (*looking for his money*). No, no; my turn.

RED. Kape your money, me bye, you may be needin' av ut to see London agin —

TOFFY. Good ol' Lon'on.

RED. Or your poor old mither may be needin' av ut t' get

your soul out av purgatory. (*He pushes a cup of ginger ale toward Toffy. Tries to be jovial*) There ye are, me bye.

TOFFY (*with a sorry smile*). Righto. Cheero!

RED. Rotten stuff!

TOFFY. Blarsted red pepper!

RED (*to Kevork*). Is ut feedin' th' stranger man you've been?

KEVORK. Yes, Effendi.

RED. What's he been sayin' to ye th' toime?

TOFFY. 'E ain't got a drink abaht 'im, 'as 'e?

KEVORK. No, no, Effendi. No!

RED. Ut's lookin' loike a graveyard ye are this minute, Kevork. What's he been sayin' to ye?

KEVORK. Strange tales he tells to me about —

RED. Tales is ut?

KEVORK. About Got an' —

TOFFY. W'at d' I tell yer? One o' them bloody missionaries.

RED. Oh-o-o. 'Tis a long toime since the fear av God wint out av this country. Sure didn't I see ut with me own two eyes at th' Church av th' Holy Sepulcher? One sect agin the other; th' praists ridy t' cut each other's throats and th' infidal Turk sittin' there in one corner kapin' guard over th' lot av thim!

TOFFY. Shootin' craps or somefin.

RED. 'Tis a hard thing t' see th' church goin' t' nothin'.

TOFFY. W'at good is it? Ho! Them preacher blokes wiv their long faces; w'at's th' good, I arsks?

RED. Oh, me auld mither, God rest her soul, wint t' mass as reg'lar as taps, and ut was a great rest to her soul. 'Twas a happy and continted woman she was — and there were many loike her in those days. But there is no fear av God or th' divil in th' world nowadays.

KEVORK. He tolt me so . . . but he speaks of a beeg new broderhood. I can't un'erstant eet all. He tolt me about fait'.

RED. Faith? Faith in what?

KEVORK. Fait' in Got.

RED. Is ut that he's been tellin' ye?

KEVORK. An' about miracles an' —

TOFFY. Miracles! (*He turns to Red appealingly*). Gawd blimey, th' Toff's orf 'is bloody 'ead. Let's get aht o' this bloomin' place, Red, afore we gets into a bloody mixup.

RED. Sit a while.

KEVORK (*he shuffles back to the bar*). I weesh I knew . . . I weesh I knew —

[*The Stranger enters from the room at the back and quietly walks to the center of the room; there is a short pause.*

RED (*to the Stranger*). Would ye mind if a man made bold t' speak with ye?

THE STRANGER. No; I —

RED. Kevork here tells us ye are a stranger, and a lonesome place ut is for a stranger, I'm thinkin'.

TOFFY. A bloody place, this!

RED. Will ye sit down a bit?

THE STRANGER. Yes —

RED. Ah — (*He drags a chair from the wall and places it at the table*) Sit down. (*He nods toward Toffy*) This is Toffy, loike myself, av the King's army. Hi, Kevork, bring us another cup.

KEVORK. Yes, Effendi.

RED. You'll drink with us?

THE STRANGER. Yes, gladly.

TOFFY. Been 'ere long?

THE STRANGER. I came to-day — from a far country.

TOFFY. Been 'ere afore?

THE STRANGER. Yes; a long time ago.

TOFFY. Thank Gawd we ain't.

[*Kevork gives a cup to Red, who fills it.*

RED. 'Tis a forsaken place Jerusalem is, fer a educated man.

TOFFY. Ho, yus. No pubs, no music 'alls, no nothin'. Ho, I'm fed oop! Nothin' but bloomin' 'eathens 'n' dirty beggars!

RED (*he pushes a cup toward the Stranger*). Here's your drink.

THE STRANGER. Thank you . . . Red.

RED. Eh? (*he looks up quickly*). Oh. 'Tis th' best we have t' offer ye; now if we was in Ireland —

TOFFY. Or Lon'on —

RED (*he shrugs his shoulders*). But we ain't, an' 'tis little good findin' falt with our lot, ut is.

THE STRANGER. Ireland, London, Jerusalem, what does it matter? People are much the same everywhere. Life is what one makes it.

RED. D'ye think so now? (*He smiles broadly*) Thin you've niver been in th' army.

THE STRANGER. You'll believe me — sometime.

RED. I hope so. I hope so. But ut's a divil av a life we have out here.

TOFFY. Right.

RED. Every mither's son av us is wishin' this minute t' be back home. (*He leans his two elbows on the table and looks up into the Stranger's face*) D'ye mind, Stranger, t' be after tellin' us a bit av a story?

THE STRANGER. A story?

RED. Loike th' one ye was tellin' av t' Kevork, here. A miracle story. 'Tis wishin' t' see a miracle we are.

THE STRANGER. You don't believe — in *miracles?*

RED. Only what I see with me own two eyes.

THE STRANGER (*he smiles kindly; mumbles*). Ears that hear not; eyes that see not —

TOFFY (*indignantly*). 'E 'as blinkin' good eyes. 'E won th' test, 'e did.

RED. Th' best eyes, an' God is my judge, in th' whole av th' rigiment.

THE STRANGER. I mean blind to the real beauty of life. To learn — we must come again as little children.

TOFFY (*pulling his cap down over his eyes*). 'E's orf . . .

RED. Children, is ut? An' what could we be learnin' if we came again as little children?

THE STRANGER. Faith.

RED. And av what use is that?

THE STRANGER. Faith can make all things possible.

RED. Could it now?

TOFFY (*banteringly*). Yus? Could yer make a fine jug o' wine aht o' this 'ere ginger beer? I'm that bloody dry!

THE STRANGER (*he takes the jug*). Wine from this? Yes. But why?

RED. If faith could do that sure I'd believe what you're tellin' us. Could ye now make a sweet wine fer us?

[*He holds up the jug.*

THE STRANGER (*he pauses a moment*). It *is* wine.

TOFFY (*he winks at Red*). I tol' yer —

RED. I'm thinkin' you've a better imagination thin th' rist av us. (*He pours out a cup of wine from the jug*) Look! Sure ut's the truth he's tellin'.

TOFFY. Gawd strike me cockeyed!

[*The two frenzied men forget everything but the wine before them; boisterously yelling with delight they drink it down. Kevork creeps slowly toward the table.*

KEVORK. Wine!

TOFFY. Gawd blimey, yus! Silly ol' fool!

RED (*holding up his cup*). Ye see!

KEVORK. But de law — No . . . no . . . no! M. P. say — no . . . no . . . no! (*He runs to the window at the right and is about to pull down the shade when the M. P.'s face appears outside. With a suppressed oath he starts back*) De M. P.! Soldiers come! Burn house! (*He runs to the Stranger and shakes a doubled-up fist in his face*) De law — law — Why you do dees t'ing? De law say no!

THE STRANGER. Law? What law?

KEVORK. You weel know . . . you weel know! De meeletary law she says —

THE STRANGER. Military law?

KEVORK. Soldiers make de law!

THE STRANGER (*he lifts a pointed finger*). There is but one law.

KEVORK. No! No!

[*He runs to the table and tries to grab away the jug.*

RED. Out with ye!

TOFFY. Bloody ol' fool!

[*The door at the left is thrown open and the M. P. comes into the room. Kevork, trembling with fear, cringes behind the bar.*

THE M. P. Well, me lads.

TOFFY. The Police!

RED (*without looking up*). Eh —

THE M. P. (*with the mighty tread of authority he stalks to the table, takes up the jug, and smells it*). Yes . . . So it's dr-rinkin' you ar-re?

RED. Wher's th' harm in a little sweet wine?

TOFFY (*pointing to the Stranger*). This bloke gave it to us, 'e did.

RED. I want t' tell ye —

THE M. P. (*to Red*). You'd best keep oot o' this. I've got me mon. Come along with me.

[*He turns toward the Stranger.*

TOFFY (*he rises*). Yer mean — Look 'ere, Sergeant, this 'ere bloke —

THE M. P. Shut your-r mouth!

[*With a backward swing of his arm he knocks Toffy to the floor.*

KEVORK (*wringing his hands*). All dees talk about Got . . . an' I believet heem, and I believet heem! Lies . . . lies . . . lies!

THE M. P. (*he moves to the Stranger and lays a rough hand on his shoulder*). Br-ringin' your-r dir-rty booze her-re! We'll lear-rn you something, me mon!

THE STRANGER. I — I don't know what you mean.

THE M. P. Na doot! Comin' her-re in the night to sell your liquor-r!

THE STRANGER. But there is only —

THE M. P. (*pushing the Stranger out through the door at the left*). Shut up!

THE STRANGER. There is only water in the jug!

KEVORK (*he runs to the door and calls after the two men*).

Talkink about miracles an' all de time bringink ruin down on me! Peeg! Peeg! Son of a Peeg! Psfft!
[*He spits.*

TOFFY. Dirty Scotchman! Gawd roast 'is bloody 'ide! (*Dragging himself to his feet*) That Stranger was a sly one, 'e was. Slippin' us th' drinks right afore our bloody eyes an' us not seein' 'im do it! He must 'a' 'ad it in 'is bloody pocket — but 'ow 'e got it into th' jug is more'n I can tell.

RED (*who is still looking at the door at the left*). He said water —

TOFFY. Wa'er? Ho, yus! Come on, 'ave another — (*He pours out a drink*) Gawd blimey! It *is* wa'er!

RED. Eh? (*The truth dawns upon him slowly*) This night me own two eyes have seen a miracle!

TOFFY. Did yer say — miracle?

KEVORK (*creeping toward the table*). Miracle, Effendi?

RED. Yes . . . yes —

KEVORK. I'll run after and tell the M. P.

RED (*he reaches out his hand and pushes Kevork away*). It's no use, me bye. No . . . no, they'd say it was dhrunk ye were. They'd niver believe ye, niver. (*He rises and walks to left of the room and stands looking at the open door*) This night a holy man has been with us here and no one av us at all could see him.

KEVORK. Effendi!

RED. Blind he said we was . . . blind!

TOFFY (*who has crept back to the table*). I'm blowed! (*He lifts the jug*) 'N' nothin' to drink but wa'er.

THE DEVIL'S GOLD

SARAH JEFFERIS CURRY

MRS. SARAH JEFFERIS CURRY comes from a literary family. Her father was Doctor D. W. Jefferis of Chester, Pennsylvania. She is a graduate of Emerson College, Boston, and has spent several years in public speaking as a reader and lecturer. Later Mrs. Curry took the courses in English literature given by Professor Thomas D. O'Bolger at the University of Pennsylvania.

"The Devil's Gold" is a dramatization of Chaucer's "Pardoner's Tale."

THE DEVIL'S GOLD

A DRAMATIZATION OF CHAUCER'S PARDONER'S TALE

By SARAH JEFFERIS CURRY

Characters

THE PARDONER
THE DEVIL
DEATH
NICK, the Taverner's son
THE TAVERNER
JANKYN
RAUF } Roisterers
BAREBONES
AN OLD MAN

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Applications for permission to produce "The Devil's Gold" should be addressed to Mr. Thomas A. Curry, Belasco Theatre, New York. No performance may be given without his consent.

THE DEVIL'S GOLD

PROLOGUE

The Pardoner appears before the curtain. He is tall and slightly stooped. His flaxen hair falls to his shoulders and curls upward. He wears the ecclesiastical garb of the Chaucerian period. A wallet containing holy relics hangs from his girdle. He speaks in high, singsong voice.

PARDONER. Good men and women who are gathered here,
List to the words of ancient pardoner.
Your liking is that I tell forth a tale,
Of men who drank too deep of corny ale —
Rioted, gamed and fought in cursed wise,
Fulfilling for Death the Devil's Sacrifice.

[*The Pardoner goes behind the curtain, which rises on a stage showing the early twilight. It is autumn, and the leaves have partly fallen from the tree in the background; a village can be seen in the distance. On the left is the outside of a tavern, from which come, indistinctly, the shouts of drunken men. On the right is a large, blasted oak tree, from whose branches hang two skeletons. It is the Hangman's tree. A pile of withered leaves is on the ground beneath the trunk. The trunk is to be made with a transparency, through which Devil and Death can show at will.*

DEVIL (*stepping from trunk of oak tree*). Ho, Death — Thou Harvester of souls, appear. 'Tis I, the Devil, summoning thee.

DEATH (*appearing from edge of wood*). Why callest me hither, Devil?

DEVIL (*grinning and pointing to tavern*). There be three souls in yonder tavern must be mine to-day, good Death.

DEATH. Have Patience, Devil; canst thou not wait until I raise their bodies in the hangman's noose — (*Pointing to the limbs of the blasted oak*) even as those whose shells are rattling in the wind?

DEVIL. Too shrewd are they to risk their necks. Their souls are black through mingling with my servants, Lust and Greed, yet fearful to do aught to bring them to the Hangman's tree. Nay, Death, I will not wait.

DEATH. What's to be done?

DEVIL (*drawing Death toward him. They stand together facing the tavern from which the drunken yells come*). Hearken! They pass their time in gaming, guzzling, and in wanton joys with Bawds. Full many a year my servant Lust hath led them on in fleshly way, but still they keep from any deeds that would bring Shameful Death. As they have lived in shame, so must they die. And I have guarded them, as only I can guard mine own, from Peaceful Death and shriven soul. Now I have planned a snare — Behold! (*He waves his hand toward the leaves under the blasted oak. They assume the appearance of gold florins*) Howe'er a soul resist all else, should it but covet gold, its ruin is secure. Away! (*To the gold. The gold turns again to withered leaves*) *Now* I must have those three — I'd take them swift — lest they should falter in the path of sin, and so turn from it e'er thou harvest them. Wilt take them, Death?

DEATH. Swiftly and willingly. Who are the three, and what thy purpose?

DEVIL. The three I'd take are Jankyn, Barebones and the evil Rauf. Now hear me, Death. By arts best known to me, I've caused foul rats to overrun the hostelry, so that the Taverner hath poison always by him.

DEATH (*gleefully rubbing his hands*). Good! Good! Thou merry Devil.

DEVIL. I'll lure them with the sight of gold, and when my servant Greed hath conquered them, I'll sink the thought of poison in their minds. (*The Tavern door opens and Nick*

comes out, stretching and yawning) Away! 'Tis Nick, the Taverner's son.

[*Devil and Death disappear into the tree. Nick is a pretty boy of fourteen wearing a smock. His hair is tousled; he carries two dead rats by the tail. He also carries a box of poison.*

NICK (*calling back to his father the Taverner. He waves the box of poison*). The poison worketh, father. We'll soon be ratless here.

[*The boy puts the box of poison on the step. Throws the rats away.*

TAVERNER (*coming out. He is red-faced, rotund and bullet-headed*). See that thou spread more poison around.

NICK. Aye, father, that I will. (*He sprinkles poison under the doorstep. Takes two buckets from the shelf by the tavern door*) I'll to the Spring for water.

[*Drunken yells from within.*

TAVERNER (*looking at tavern*). If all the world used no more water than those three within, our spring would ne'er run dry.

NICK. Two of them yowl like tomcats, and the third is fast asleep. The only part of him that seems to live is his great nose. 'Tis in full cry.

TAVERNER. 'Tis Barebones. The bellows of a monster must be in that breast of his.

NICK (*laughing*). He tooted through his nose — thus — Samson — Samson — Samson.

[*Imitating snore.*

TAVERNER. The drunken lout. He and his Samson!

NICK. Why said he Samson, father? Was Samson drunken?

TAVERNER. Nay — not he — else how could he have slain a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass? But I will rouse this Barebones. Where is my cudgel, Nick?

NICK. Beneath the settle.

[*Taverner goes in. Nick goes toward the wood in the background, carrying his pails, singing. As Nick's voice dies*

away, noise and shouting are heard within, the Taverner calling on the three carousers to go. They pile out cursing, the Taverner following them with his cudgel.

Jankyn is a powerful, well-set-up man with black hair and a heavy, red face. He gives an impression of much strength. Barebones has light hair, which is very thin. He is flat-chested and his cheeks are sunken — his eyes hollow from dissipation. He is long and lean. Rauf is small, evil-mouthed and villainous looking. In facial appearance he is not unlike the Devil.

TAVERNER. Out, out, you drunken crew.

JANKYN. We are not so drunk as you are, master. What sort of taverner art thou, to cudgel paying guests?

TAVERNER. Paying guests! The ill-repute you bring my house keeps decent folk away. You're drunk — be off!

JANKYN. Drunk! (*Pulling himself up and walking*) See — I can walk.

RAUF. And so can I.

[*He straightens up.*

BAREBONES (*drunkenly*). And I, too, when I walk between you.

[*Places himself between the others. They walk in the direction of the Hangman's tree, observed from the trunk by the Devil and Death. Jankyn and Rauf draw away from Barebones suddenly, and he falls into the heap of leaves.*

JANKYN. More liquor, Taverner.

RAUF. And quickly.

BAREBONES (*weakly*). Aye, quickly. I could do with more.

TAVERNER. Show me your purse. There's still a score against you all.

[*The men exchange glances and it is evident that none of them has money.*

JANKYN. We'll pay thee on the morrow.

TAVERNER (*laughing scornfully*). Then on the morrow shall ye drink.

[*He goes in, slamming the door.*

RAUF. The grasping thief.

BAREBONES (*shedding maudlin tears*). The swinish, drunken dog! I've not had near enough. I cried against the spending of our every coin —

JANKYN (*interrupting*). But you cried for liquor, and like a river kept it flowing down that thirsty throat. All the florins in the land could not serve to keep your muzzle wet.

RAUF. All the florins in the land! I would we had them!

[*The Devil nudges Death and both laugh.*

JANKYN (*heaving a great sigh*). Would we had them! Then would we drink and play! Full twoscore women in our company. Female tumblers, graceful and small, dancers and bawds, full-hipped and young.

[*Smacks his lips.*

BAREBONES. And wine a — plenty.

JANKYN. Aye, wine, thou guzzler.

RAUF. And singers with harps —

JANKYN. No Taverner then could say us nay —

[*During the talk, the Devil and Death show that they are well pleased.*

TAVERNER (*coming out*). What! Still here! Begone!

JANKYN. Aye — still here! The space beneath the Hangman's tree is every man's.

TAVERNER (*grimly*). Thou sayest full sooth — The tree itself is thine!

[*Goes in, slamming door.*

Nick, followed by an old man, comes into view. Nick is carrying the two buckets full of water and encouraging the old man. The latter is bent almost double with age, and is wrapped in rags. He carries a staff. He has all the decrepitude of extreme age in voice and appearance.

JANKYN. Who cometh here?

NICK. An old man I found lying by the spring. Naught hath he eaten since yestermorn. I'll bring bread for him — he hath no florins in his pouch.

[*Goes into Tavern.*

JANKYN (*as the three approach him*). What, old man — why art thou all bewrapped, save thy face? Say, how can one be old as thou and yet remain alive?

OLD MAN. 'Tis not my pleasure to be old, no more than one would pass a crisp ripe apple by and choose a withered one. I am so old because I cannot find a man in any land would change his youth for my great age.

JANKYN. And has thy quest then been to find a youth who'd change with thee?

OLD MAN. Nay — 'tis only Death I seek. Since he'll not come to me, I'll search for him.

[*Death makes signs that he will not have the old man.*

BAREBONES (*drunkenly*). Thou'lt not have far to go, I'm thinking.

RAUF. Come, come, old Bag of Bones — shake up thy joints!

OLD MAN. Hurry me not, for I am old and spent. Let me be gone, for I am on a quest.

JANKYN. A quest, sayest thou? And so are we. A quest for Joy and Life!

[*They caper around him.*

OLD MAN. Your caperings weary me.

JANKYN. Ah, do they so? Thou saucy wretch! Join in our revels e'er we buffet thee.

OLD MAN. Aye, you can revel, being full of life. Thou — (*pointing to Jankyn*) well might thy name be Lust, thou seemst so full of lusty life. And thou — (*pointing to Rauf*) with sharpened visage and thy caperings, to me like Devil seemeth. And thou — (*pointing to Barebones*) well might thou pass for Death!

[*The three shout at him in derision and joining hands, form a circle about the old man. They dance around him, pushing him back and forth with their shoulders, within the circle. They break up with a yell. He sinks to the ground, covering his face with his hands.*

OLD MAN. Would I might find Death. He'd kinder be than men.

BAREBONES. Now, out upon him, Jankyn. Away with him.
[*Spurns him with foot.*

JANKYN. Away with him. We'll have no preaching here.

NICK (*running out*). Let him be. (*Calling*) Father, Father! Ye idle wretches! (*The three men run up into the wood. Death looks at the old man and turns away*) Rise up and come within. A seat by kindled fagots and some bread and wine will hearten thee.
[*He helps the old man to his feet.*

OLD MAN (*passionately to Nick*). Alas! Death will not have my life — Thus walk I restless, to and fro. And on the ground, which is my mother's gate, I knock with my staff, early and late, and say, "Loved mother, let me in" — (*Knocks with his staff on the ground*) Lo, how I vanish, flesh and blood and skin. Alas! When shall my bones be placed at rest? And yet for me she would not do that grace, for which full pale and wrinkled is my face.
[*Nick helps the old man into the Tavern. The door closes. Death and the Devil step out from the tree.*

DEVIL. Now will it come to pass. Soon yours they'll be — then mine.
[*He and Death go aside and watch Jankyn, Barebones and Rauf who are peering out from the wood's edge. When the door has closed Jankyn comes down.*

JANKYN. They've gone within. Come, we are safe.
[*They walk down. As they approach the tree, the Devil points to the leaves, and they assume the appearance of gold florins.*

JANKYN (*sees the gold*). Look! What is there? (*Rauf and Barebones stare with him and all are speechless*) 'Tis gold!

RAUF. It cannot be!

JANKYN (*approaches the gold and takes up a piece*). It is.
[*He drops on his knees and plunges his hands and arms into the gold.*

BAREBONES. Whence came it?

JANKYN. God wot! Enough that it is there.

RAUF. 'Twas buried neath the leaves!

BAREBONES. Aye!

RAUF. We lay on this most precious gold and might have passed it by.

JANKYN. Fortune has given us this treasure that we may live our lives in mirth and jollity.

RAUF. And lightly as it comes, so will we lightly spend!

BAREBONES. Now who would think to-day that we should have such fortune?

JANKYN. But we must bear it hence —

RAUF. Aye — home to my house.

[*The others growl dissent.*

JANKYN. Why thine?

BAREBONES. 'Twould safer be in mine.

JANKYN. Nay — we'll divide it here — into three equal parts and each shall have his own.

RAUF. Nay — let one man guard it all.

JANKYN. Perhaps it is not gold at all. First let us try its power by offering it to yonder Taverner for wine, and drink to our good fortune.

BAREBONES. The wine! The wine!

JANKYN (*picking up a gold piece*). Here, Rauf! Bring wine.

[*Hands him the gold.*

BAREBONES (*picking up a piece of gold*). And I will buy some too.

RAUF. Both need not go. The gold —

[*He speaks in an aside to Barebones, glancing at Jankyn so that it is evident Rauf is speaking of Jankyn.*

JANKYN. Stand thou with me, Barebones, and help me guard this treasure.

[*He gives Barebones a significant look.*

RAUF. Aye. 'Twill safer be with two on guard. Now will I fetch the wine.

[*He crosses toward the door of the Tavern. The Devil speaks to Death and disappears. A bat (the Devil) flutters toward Rauf and circles his head. He slaps at it but it passes close to his ear. He is struck by a thought and stops. The bat flutters away. Rauf sees the poison outside the door where*

Nick left it. He glances quickly at the other two. They have their heads close together and are talking in undertones. Rauf picks up the package of poison and goes into the tavern. The bat has fluttered back to the tree and poises at Jankyn's ear. Jankyn starts and looks after Rauf.

JANKYN (*to Barebones*). My dear friend, it were a shame to share this gold in three. That fellow — (*looking after Rauf*) is full of villainy! If it were shared 'twixt two, have I not done a friendly turn to thee?

[*The bat disappears — the Devil reappears beside Death. They listen and laugh.*

BAREBONES. I know not how that may be. He knows the gold is here with us — what shall we do?

JANKYN. Two are stronger than one. Let me think. (*He leans back against the tree, eyes closed, thinking. The Devil leans out and whispers to him. Jankyn's eyes open suddenly. He sits up*) As soon as Rauf hath come and sits him down, reach to him as in jest, as though you'd play; wrap his two arms close to his sides, and I will stab him through, and see thou doest the same. He comes. Let us pretend to wrestle.

[*They wrestle and strike each other. Rauf, carrying a bottle of wine and two cups, has come out. They fall on the gold and roll over. Rauf returns the poison to its place.*

RAUF. Why wrestle ye?

JANKYN. 'Tis only play. We frolic at the thought of all our treasure. Sit down — we'll drink to each.

[*Rauf sits. He hands the bottle to Jankyn.*

RAUF. Drink, both, and make ye merry. I had mine within.

[*Jankyn glances at Barebones who reaches over to Rauf.*

BAREBONES (*as he throws his arm around Rauf, pinning Rauf's arms as he does so*). I would wrestle with thee. (*He laughs*) I'll roll thee for a florin.

JANKYN (*laughing*). Aye, wrestle.

[*Barebones, laughing, pulls Rauf on his back.*

RAUF. Cease this wild play. Drink of the wine, else will I buffet thee but not in sport.

JANKYN. Nay, do not spoil the play. See, I'll join with thee. (*He moves swiftly over and stabs Rauf, who starts to make an outcry, but Barebones muffles it with his scarf. Jankyn stabs Rauf again. Barebones also stabs him. Rauf lies still. He is dead. They wipe their daggers and put them away. Jankyn, pouring wine into the cups*) Now that is done, let's drink. Then will we bury him and take our gold away.

BAREBONES. Aye, make haste, lest any come. (*They drink*) Another.

[*They pour and drink again.*

JANKYN. Go within and get a pouch. I will drag the body there — (*pointing to wood*) where 'twill be free from sight of any passer.

[*Barebones starts for the door of the Tavern. Jankyn takes hold of Rauf to draw him away, into the shadow of the trees. As he bends to do so, the poison works and he pitches across Rauf and on to the pile of gold. He has a convulsion and dies. Barebones has fallen by the doorway. He writhes and is still. The Devil and Death come out.*

DEVIL (*pointing to the gold, which has become a pile of leaves again*). The Devil's gold hath done the Devil's bidding.

DEATH. Now will I place my sign upon them, and all will know that Death is here.

[*He touches them and they become rigid.*

DEVIL. Now are they mine — all three are mine.

[*The Curtain closes. The Pardoner appears before it.*

EPILOGUE

PARDONER. Now, all gentle people, God forgive your trespass and keep you from the sin of Avarice.

(*The epilogue can be lengthened if desired*)

BLOOD O' KINGS

JANE DRANSFIELD

JANE DRANSFIELD was born in Rochester, New York, and was educated in the city schools. She later attended Vassar College and has since then lived in New York City. She is a poet and a playwright.

Her best known plays and the most popular in production are "The Lost Pleiad," a poetic fantasy, and the one-act plays "The White Window" and "Joe, a Hudson Valley Play."

BLOOD O' KINGS

A PLAY

By JANE DRANSFIELD

Characters

JIM O'BRIEN, keeper of the "Place"

GUY, SAM — White workers in the brickyards

MIKE, TONY — Italian workers on the railroad

FOS DUANE, negro worker in the brickyards

GEORGE, KEP, RED — Other men

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No performance of this play may be given without special arrangement with Miss Jane Dransfield, who may be addressed in care of Rhythmus, 150 East 34th Street, New York City.

BLOOD O' KINGS

Jim O'Brien's "Place" in the brickyard region of Hudson Valley.

The "Place" is in an isolated spot, with no houses near. The room is clean, neat, well lighted from a large, shining center oil lamp hanging from the ceiling. To the left is the bar, with a cash register, a plate of hard-boiled eggs, and the usual appurtenances. To the left is the outer door. Chairs and tables are at either side. To the right front is a Victrola, with records on a shelf above it. In the rear, curtains of cheap, bright-patterned velour hang drawn together. To the right of these curtains, on a stand, is a box with a slit on the top like a ballot box. Above this box, tacked to the wall, is a placard on which is printed in large capitals by hand the word "Caesar." *On the left is another similar box, above which the placard is marked* "Alexander." *In the rear right corner hangs a fykes fish net. An overcoat hangs on a peg near the door. When the curtains are opened later in the action, there is disclosed a pit sunk fully three feet beneath the level of the floor, and also lighted by a center hanging oil lamp. This is the cockpit. In a cage, not visible except as one looks down into the pit, to the right, is a pure white fighting-cock. To the left a similar cage with a black cock.*

It is evening. Jim stands behind the bar, washing glasses. Blue-eyed, clean-shaven, immaculately neat, a muscular man of middle age, he has completely the air of being master on his premises. Sam and Guy sit at a table, right, playing cards. Sam is a strapping woodsman, Guy is undersized, white-faced, already in the grip of "consumption," the prevailing disease of the region. Sam is about to deal.

GUY. Say, we ain't settled on yit what we ur playin' fer, nickels or dimes.

SAM. Make it nickels. Save up fer "Caesar" an' "Alexander," when the rest of the fellus cums in. (*Turns to Jim*) Jim, what's the reason yo' allas give yer cocks them two names?

JIM. They was good fighters, them two men.

SAM. Friends of yourn?

JIM. You poor fish! They're dead, hundreds of years. Kings they was, always out for big stakes. Liked to read about 'em when I went to school.

SAM. Guess I never got thet fer in readin'.

[*Turns back to the game.*

JIM. Alexander was a kind of Greek, Caesar an Italian.

GUY (*surprised*). A wop, like Tony? Gee!

JIM. All wops ain't wops, Guy. Don't you know that?

[*The deal finished, Sam waits for Guy to play, turns again to Jim.*

SAM. What breed ur the cocks, this time, Jim?

JIM. Best southern stock, Warhorses, way back, and Claibornes. Same as Shrove Tuesday fight, last year. Full as fiery as the Birchins and Mealy Greys of the Shrove Tuesday fights I used to go to when I was a boy in North England. Gee! them was some mains, boys, hundreds of cocks up, and bets! Never saw nothing like 'em over here. This one cock show ain't in it.

SAM. Thought you war Irish, Jim.

JIM. Born in Ireland, raised in North England country — much like this about here, rocks, and land not good for much. That's one reason I guess I settled here for good. Kind of like it hereabouts.

SAM. Shrove Tuesday; what kind of a day is thet?

JIM. Day before Ash Wednesday, kind of a church day.

SAM. Gosh! Jim, cockfights ain't got nottin' ter do with religion.

JIM. Sure, they ain't. But when Shrove Tuesday comes around, the March two years old is in best trim. Still, Sam, you know what they say, when the cock stops crowing, the day of judgment comes.

GUY. Do yo' spur yer cocks, Jim, fer fightin'?

SAM. Yo're a sweet babe, Guy. Spur 'em! Yo' mus' think this is goin' ter be a barnyard affair.

GUY (*abashed*). Wull, I ain't never been at but one cockfight afore. Then I war too fur off ter see much. Over at Halloran's.

[*The door opens. Tony, a swarthy Italian of about forty, half enters, pauses. Mike, a younger Italian, lithe and handsome, stands behind him.*

JIM. Evening, Tony.

TONY. Evenin', boss. Mike, coma in?

JIM. Friend of yours?

TONY. Cousin.

JIM. All right. Come in. (*Tony signals Mike to follow him in. Sam and Guy continue their game*) Shut the door, Tony.

[*Tony shuts the door, then advances to the bar with Mike.*

TONY. Hees name Mike Caluori. He from Chicago. Work there year. He not married. Got lotsa money, boss.

JIM. Evening, Mike. Glad to know you.

MIKE (*his voice is soft and melodious*). Evenin', boss.

TONY. How mucha teeket, Jim?

JIM. Same price, always same price for cockfights. Two dollars.

TONY (*places two dollars on the counter*). Alla right. Mike, you pay two dollar, too.

[*Mike takes out a roll of bills, hands Jim a five. Jim makes the change from the cash register.*

JIM Price of tickets, Mike, goes to house, same as drinks.

MIKE. Yeh.

[*Jim puts the money for the tickets into the cash register. Mike puts fifty cents on the counter.*

TONY. Mike wanta good drink, boss. He no speak much, yet.

[*Jim prepares a drink for Mike, then deposits the coin in the register. Mike stands at the bar, Tony goes to the boxes, examines them, and the signs, looks into the pit.*

GUY. Halloran don't charge no admission fer cockfights.

[*The door opens slightly, unnoticed.*

JIM. All right. Them as wants to get malaria sittin' round Halloran's pigsty is welcome.

GUY. Oh, I ain't findin' no fault, Jim.

TONY. Jim, you tella Mike how he put up hees money.

JIM. Pari mutuel, Mike. Five dollar unit.

SAM. Up at Halloran's we bets among ourselves.

JIM. I run my place, Sam, to suit myself. If you don't like it, get out.

SAM. No harm meant, Jim.

TONY (*joins Mike*). Mike no understan', boss.

JIM (*leans over the counter toward Mike, takes some slips of cardboard from his pocket*). It's like this, Mike. There's two cocks fighting; one is white. His name is "Caesar." The other is black. His name is "Alexander." You choose your bird. For each five dollars you put into the box that has the name of your cock above it, you get one of these slips to put in with it. Write your name on the slip, see? I put it down here, too, on this slate. (*Shows Mike a slate*) So there can't be no cheating. Five dollars, one slip, ten dollars, two, and so on. Understand?

MIKE. Yeh.

JIM. Them as bets on the winning cock gets the pile to divide among 'em, according to the number of slips you put in. Cash register cuts in for ten per cent. See?

MIKE. Yeh. Alla right, boss.

TONY (*leads Mike toward the pit*). You bet on Caesar, Mike, whita cock. He got very red comb, big.

JIM. Tony, you let Mike choose his own cock. Both birds is equal, hustlers from the start and always good for one last kick.

SAM. Thet's right, Jim. No tips on the races.

[*Tony and Mike look into the pit. Tony turns to Jim.*

TONY. Say, when you gona start theesa fight?

[*The door is thrust open, and George, Kep, and Red enter. George and Kep are grown men, Red a youth with a shock of red hair.*

JIM. Here's the rest of the boys, now. Evening, George. Evening, Kep. Evening, Red.

[*The men respond, George standing at the door.*

GEORGE. Fos Duane is outside, wants to cum in.

JIM. Nothing doing. Shut the door.

[*George shuts the door, then joins Kep and Red at the bar. All purchase tickets, and drinks. Jim is busy serving them.*

SAM (*over the game*). Thet's played, Guy. No takin' back.

[*The door opens again, and Fos Duane enters. He is a powerful negro, proud, quick, bold, with the grace of his race.*

JIM (*he stops his work, as he sees Fos*). No admission, Fos.

FOS (*he closes the door, leans against it*). I'se got the price of a ticket.

[*His voice is deep and vibrant.*

JIM. No go.

[*Mike and Tony at the pit, Sam and Guy from the card table, the others from the bar, turn toward Fos, scenting a contest.*

FOS. Been workin' a month, steady. Can put up good an' strong.

[*Shows a roll of money.*

JIM. Makes no difference. Get out of here.

FOS (*indicates Tony and Mike*). Sell them ginks tickets?

JIM. Sure.

FOS. But not me?

JIM (*comes from behind the counter, faces Fos*). Sorry, Fos. Can't be done.

FOS. That new fella thar, he's as black as me.

JIM. Mebbe, but he's not nigger.

FOS. No tickets to niggers, eh?

JIM. Same as no booze.

[*Mike and Tony sit at a table, and play "crap." Sam rises, throws a quarter down on the counter.*

SAM. Oh, cum on, Jim. Give me a quarter whisky, ef we've got ter stay here jawin'.

[*Jim goes behind the counter again, serves Sam. George, Kep, and Red saunter toward the pit, part the curtains, look in. Guy joins them. Fos advances toward the bar. Jim holds up his hand warningly.*

JIM. No, Fos. I've got my rules, an' I stick to 'em. (*Sam takes a hard-boiled egg, breaks the shell away, stands eating the egg*) Same as the government sticks to its rules of the fykes fishing. (*Indicates the nets in the corner*) When the spring comes, and I want to let down them nets in the River, I can't let 'em down, only when and where the government says.

FOS (*scornfully, sits down at a table*). My word! Jim O'Brien, is you as big as de government?

[*Guy saunters front, looks over the Victrola records.*

JIM. No. But I'm the keeper of this place. Fifteen years I've been here, an' never a sheriff inside my door, nor no complaints. Always ran a decent place. I don't take no risks. Niggers is risks.

[*Setting away the glasses.*

FOS. W'en did de Lor' Gawd make yo' de jedge o' niggers? Mebbe some niggers is risks. Not me, not Fos Duane.

JIM. All niggers is risks.

FOS. Yo' got some perticul'r hunch agin me.

SAM. He's thinkin' of Mamie, Jim. His Mamie Rose.

FOS. Mamie ain't in on dis. Dere's some things as women don' hev nothin' tuh do wid.

SAM. Mebbe, some things, but mighty few. I tell yo', Jim, Fos is thinkin' of thet day las' summer when Mamie cum here all dressed up like a queen in a yaller dress, wid a red rose in the top of her hair. You wouldn't let her come in, 'member? (*Jim nods, putting away the last glasses, and tidying the counter, preparatory to what he intends to do*) She sat on the doorstep, an' sung to yo'. Fos cum along, an' made her go up ter hum wid him. He's sore 'bout Mamie, Fos is.

FOS (*starts up*). Dat's a lie, Sam Brown. Mamie don' trouble me, no moh. She wen' down souf las' fall when de brickyards shet down, same as de robins fly down to de rice fields. I won' see Mamie, no moh. Dis is deeper 'an women 'tween Jim an' me.

[*Guy starts the Caruso record* "O Sole Mio." *Fos sits down again. Mike looks up from his game, sways to the music.*

MIKE. Tony — nica music.

TONY (*rises impatiently*). Say, boss, when theesa fight gona begin?

JIM (*comes from behind the bar, a set look on his face*). Just a minute, my friend. Don't get impatient. (*Goes toward Fos threateningly*) Fos, you're holdin' up the game. All the boys is here. Get out.

FOS. Jes' cas I'se a nigger, eh? Ain't a nigger got a right to a leetle 'citin' pleasure, aftuh workin' hard, same as anybody? An' who made me a nigger anyhow?

JIM. Guy, stop that jazz.

[*Guy stops the Victrola. Mike continues humming the tune. Tony sits down again.*

JIM. I told you I was sorry, Fos, an' I mean it. But rules is rules. If you've got to spend the evening somewheres, go up to Halloran's in the Hollow.

FOS. I heared what yo' said. I war outside de dohr. I ain't got no hankerin' tuh git de chills an' feber. I like it betta heah.

JIM. There's the door, Fos.

FOS (*rises*). Listen tuh me, Jim O'Brien, an' all of yo'. (*All turn toward Fos, listening, except Tony and Mike, who continue at "crap"*) In de brickyard de boss don' objec' tuh me workin' longside Sam an' dis pale-faced Guy, here, who's goin' tuh quit dis worl' pretty soon. An' neider do Sam an' Guy objec', 'cept as how I stacks up more brick in one hour 'an they does in two. An' de boss on de railroad, he don' kick 'gainst my workin' longside Tony, an' new guineas, lak his frien' here. An' dey don' kick, neider, far as I see.

JIM. That's different. Working is different. It ain't the same.

[*He takes hold of Fos's arm to lead him toward the door. Fos shakes him off, saunters toward the pit. The men part, and let him look in. He becomes excited.*

FOS. Hi! Dar's a black cock up. I bet twenty on de nigger cock. He's my color.

[*Takes out his money, goes to deposit it in the box at the left, Jim intervenes.*

JIM. No, Fos. Rules is rules. Come, I've been patient with you. Now be a gentleman, and get out.

FOS. (*after an instant's hesitation*). All right. I'se gwine. (*Puts his money back into his pocket, crosses to the door, where he turns*) But yo', Jim O'Brien, as keeps dis place, an' yo', Sam Brown, as hev rudder go trampin' through de woods any day wid a gun 'an work, an' yo' pale face, as is soon tuh die — an' yo', Tony, rich as a bank president, de hull o' yo' as thinks yo' is better 'an me — listen to Fos Duane. Dar's kings in me, blood o' kings! (*The men start to laugh, but Jim, who stands at the counter sorting the betting slips, his back partly turned toward Fos, signals them to silence*) Nobody tol' me I war born o' kings — nobody need tuh. I knows. I knows. I can feel 'em inside o' me. An' de kings I war born from, dey went free — black kings, whose skin shone lak de sun, an' who hed women slenda as de new moon — kings as dug gol' out o' de groun', who neber took no guf, who neber stacked no bricks, who hunted game bigger 'an Sam ebber dreamed o' — kings who nebber died o' no white disease, nor kep' no bar, nor worked on no railroad. (*Obedient to Jim's wishes, the men still keep silence*) An' now yo' drive me out, cas I'm nigger, an' niggers is risks. An' I'se gwine tuh go. I'se gwine — tuh oblige yo' all.

[*Opens the door.*

JIM. That's a good fellow, Fos. Good night.

[*Fos passes through the doorway. Before the door is shut, the men break into loud guffaws. Fos instantly stops, his*

hand on the knob, listening. The door conceals him from them.

GUY (*in the room*). Gee! whet do yer think of thet?

SAM. Born of kings, is he? ha! ha! Sure, niggers is got some imagination.

JIM. Yes, that's why they're risks.

[*Jim draws his slips together. Sam slaps George on the back, still laughing.*

SAM. Say, George, next time we go in town we'll buy a crown at the five an' ten, an' we'll tie it on Fos's head wid a red ribbon. See! King Fos! King Fos Duane! Ha — ha — ha! Hell! Blood of kings in him!

[*As Sam speaks, Fos lifts himself up to his full height proudly, his face growing dark and ominous. The men join in Sam's laughter. Slowly Fos draws a pistol from his pocket. Jim comes from behind the bar.*

JIM. All ready, now, boys, for the fun. (*Crosses to the rear, draws the curtains aside, disclosing the lighted pit. Fos closes the door. The men gather together at the pit*) Allow me to introduce "Caesar," the white cock. (*Indicates the cock at the right*) And "Alexander," black. (*Indicates the cock at the left. The cages are not visible from the front, nor are the birds at any time*) Now, boys, get out your cash, before I put on the steels. Remember, both birds is equal, full-breasted, proud and lofty. Boney, too, notice! Just four pounds apiece, March two-year-olds. In fine feather, fed up on butter, eggs and rosemary. Look at their fiery eyes. Even if they didn't want to, they've got to fight. Something inside of 'em makes 'em. Both is bloody heelers, an' close hitters. It's just a matter of choice.

[*The men have been getting their money ready as Jim speaks. As they make their bets during the following, Jim hands them the proper number of slips, a pencil, if necessary, then records the bet on the slate on the counter. The men write their names on the slips, then deposit them with their money in the right or left boxes, according to their choice of cock.*

Jim watches the money as it goes into the boxes to be sure the amount tallies with the slips. The action is continuous and spirited.

KEP. Fifteen on white cock.

JIM. Three slips. There you are, Kep.

TONY. Feefty dollar, whita cock, too.

JIM. Good, Tony. Ten slips for you. Right box.

GUY. Two units on "Alexander." He's as black as hell.

JIM. One's your limit, Guy. You need your money for medicine.

GUY. Bin insured sence I war ten. There 'ull be plenty to bury me, an' buy Maud a good black suit, too. Thet's ull I care. I got the ten, Jim. Ain't no fun 'less yo' risk somethin'.

JIM. One's your limit; get me? Break the law, if you have to, but break it decent, I say. Then there's no trouble coming. Here you are, one.

GEORGE. Thirty on "Caesar."

RED. I wisht I hed some money. Kep, lend me some.

KEP. Nottin' doin'.

JIM. Six for you, George.

SAM. Ten on "Caesar."

JIM. One slip's your limit, too, Sam, same as Guy.

SAM. Oh, guf, Jim.

JIM. You've got kids, an' a sick wife. You're out of work.

SAM. Thet's why I'm bettin', ain't it?

JIM. One slip, or get out. (*Sam accepts the slip but unwillingly*) Well, Mike, what do you say? You're the last.

MIKE. Yeh. Forty-five dollar.

JIM. Two twentys and a five. All right. Nine for you. Good! What's it on?

MIKE. Blacka cock.

JIM. Left box. "Alexander." (*He finishes the recording of the bets, puts the slate on the counter*) All ready, boys.

[*He crosses and leaps down into the pit. The men gather around, excited. Jim releases and spurs one cock, then the other. He is seen moving rapidly about the pit.*

TONY. Mike, look, Jim spur cocks.

[*Instantly the second bird is released, the fight begins. The excitement grows tense, the men leaning forward over the pit.*

GUY. Atta boy! atta boy!

GEORGE. Keep yer head up, Caesar. Don't crouch.

TONY. Hi! hi!

[*The door slowly opens, and Fos enters, pistol in hand. He is unnoticed. He stands, waiting.*

SAM. Go it, Caesar! Give him hell.

KEP. Tear his eyes out — thet's the bird.

MIKE. Santa Maria!

[*The men are so absorbed in what is taking place in the pit that still they do not notice Fos. He advances slowly, comes to the center, and turns out the hanging lamp. The lamp in the pit, however, sheds its glare into the faces of the men, so they do not notice even this. He creeps forward, and because of his height can see into the pit over the leaning forms of the men. The cockfight is now in full swing, the birds attacking furiously, but nothing is heard except an occasional whirr of angry wings, between the exclamations of the men. These exclamations are almost simultaneous.*

GUY. Go it, Alec! Go it! Rip him up the guts.

GEORGE. Atta boy! Caesar! Caesar!

MIKE. Santa Maria! Hi!

SAM. Ram his brains out, yo' son of a gun you. Caesar!

RED. Stop yer pushin', can't yer? Lemme see.

KEP. Shet up! Yo' didn't put up nottin'.

[*Fos, as he watches, becomes wildly excited.*

FOS. Hey! hey! Alexander! Fifty dollar on Alexander. I bet fifty on de black cock. (*Raises his pistol and shoots into the ceiling*) Eberybody heah me. Fifty dollar on Alexander is the bet o' Fos Duane.

JIM (*from the pit*). Hell! What's that?

SAM. It's Fos, Jim.

[*Jim springs to the side of the pit. The men draw back from Fos, so that he faces Jim in the center, Sam beside him.*

JIM. Get out of here.

FOS. When I gets good an' ready.

[*Sam seizes Fos's hand, which holds the gun.*

SAM. I've got him, Jim.

[*Fos shakes Sam off easily.*

FOS. Take yo'r dirty han's off me, yo' damned crown buyer, yo'.

[*Jim draws his gun.*

JIM. Get out of here, or I'll shoot you dead.

FOS. Shoot ef yo' wants tuh. I'se made up my mind tuh see dis fight, an' I'se gwine tuh see it, ef I does it wid dead eyes.

JIM. Who put out that lamp?

FOS. Me!

JIM. Thought you'd escape notice, did you?

FOS. Didn't wan' tuh spoil de fight too soon. But when I gets 'cited, my gun jes' goes off, natural. Betta let me stay, Jim.

JIM. No.

FOS. Den I stays, anyhow. (*He drops his gun into his pocket, pulls out a roll of money and stuffs it into the box on the left*) I put up fifty dollars, see? On "Alexander," de black cock. He's my color.

[*As he does this Jim leaps from the pit, gun in hand.*

KEP. Aw, let him stay, Jim. What's the difference?

JIM. No.

FOS. Yo' ain't gwine tuh shoot me, Jim O'Brien. Youse too 'fraid o' de sheriff, yo' is. Yo' run a decent place, yo' does. (*He finishes putting his money into the box, turns toward the crowd*) Boys, we'se missin' de fight, we is.

[*He moves toward the pit. Jim drops his gun into his pocket, gets in Fos's way.*

JIM. Sam! George! Boys! Let's put him out.

[*Fos puts his hand into the pocket into which he had dropped his pistol.*

FOS. De firs' guy as lays a finger on me, gets a ball in de guts. See? I ain't 'fraid o' no poo' white sheriff. (*He

swings a chair to the edge of the pit, sets it down backwards, and straddles it) I'se gwine tuh view dis fight from a box seat.

JIM. Fight's off. Cocks go back to their cages.

GEORGE. Jim, thet ain't fair. Our money's up.

JIM. You get your money back, all of you. I said Fos ain't comin' to this fight, an' he ain't. (*He leaps back into the pit*) This is my place, an' I run it to suit myself. Get me?

[*He stoops to catch one of the cocks. Fos springs down into the pit.*

FOS. Yo' let them birds alone, Jim O'Brien.

[*Jim rises, and faces Fos.*

JIM. You black devil, you! (*He reaches his hand for his pistol, but Fos is too quick for him, pinions his arms behind his back, and holds them in a vicelike grip, from which Jim struggles to free himself*) Damn you! Let me go!

[*Sam leaps down into the pit to Jim's assistance. Others start to follow.*

FOS. Get back! All o' yo'. Dis is 'tween Jim an' me. I can hol' him in one han', I can. What I said 'bout de gun I means.

[*Sam stops where he is. He looks at the birds, then shouts out.*

SAM. Boys! The black cock's down! He's dead. Caesar's won!

[*All rush to look into the pit.*

FOS. Wait! Mebbe the black cock *is* down. But he ain't dead. He roll hees eyes. Give him time.

JIM (*struggling in Fos's grip*). Let me go, damn you!

FOS. Yo' jes' stays where yo' are, honey!

JIM. If the black cock don't get up in twenty counts, Caesar's won. One, two, three —

FOS (*as Jim continues to count, "three, four, five, six, seven"*). He raise hees head!

JIM. Eight, nine, ten, eleven —

FOS (*Jim is counting, "twelve, thirteen, fourteen"*). Get up! Go it, comrade! Yo' ain't done fer yit.

JIM. Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen —

FOS. He's up! Go it — go it — give him hell —

[*The men forget Jim and Fos, lean in tense excitement over the pit.*

SAM. Caesar, don't let him beat yer — ram him!

MIKE. Santa Maria! Blacka cock — hi!

GEORGE. CAESAR! CAESAR!

FOS. Hey! Caesar's down! He's dead. (*Releases Jim, leaps back into the room, the men parting to let him pass*) De black cock's won! Ha, ha, ha! Black's de lucky color dis time, sure.

SAM. What do yer say, Jim?

JIM. Black's won!

[*The black cock in the pit crows.*

FOS. Sure black's won! Hear him sing hees song o' victory.

[*Jim cages the black cock, then leaps back into the room. Turns on Fos.*

JIM. I'll get even with you for this.

FOS. I ain't got no ebil eye, tuh make de white cock lose.

JIM. I mean for coming back, where you weren't wanted.

[*Takes a key from his pocket, unlocks the padlocks on the betting boxes, takes out the money.*

FOS. 'Twarn't me did it — it war de crown on my head, tied on by a red ribbon, by Sam. It war somethin' stronger in me 'an me, Jim O'Brien.

JIM. 'Spose you're waiting now for your money.

[*He takes the money to the counter, where he counts it. To make the best of his defeat in his contest with Fos, he assumes his usual business manner.*

FOS. Sure I is.

TONY. Mike, you win. Blacka cock win. You standa drinks all around.

MIKE. Yeh. Sure.

JIM. Two hundred all told. Ten percent to the house.

[*He figures on the slate. Fos sits on the edge of a table, waiting.*

SAM (*sarcastically*). 'Spose yo'll take a trip, Fos, on yer winnin's. Mebbe yo'll go down south ter see Mamie.

FOS. Mamie don' int'rest me no more. I done tol' yo' dat.

GEORGE. Better ship ter China.

FOS. I ain't gwine tuh China, nedder. I'se gwine tuh stay right whar I is, right heah, in de brickyards.

JIM (*he has finished figuring on the slate, and counts out the money*). Nine for you, Guy. Eighty-one for Mike. Ninety for Fos.

[*Guy and Mike take their money.*

FOS (*he speaks from his position on the table across the room*). Somebody han' me my money, please. (*Sam, Guy, Tony, and Mike are at the bar. Kep, Red, and George are looking in the pit. No one stirs*) Nobody willin', eh? Den I gets it mysel'. (*Saunters to the bar, takes the money*) 'Spose yo' all is wonderin' what I'se gwine do wid dis heap o' money. (*The men at the pit come forward. All turn toward Fos*) Stan' treat, mebbe yo' think. Or mebbe you think I buys a gold crown for my head. (*He crosses toward the door, where he turns, his back against it. He holds the money in his hand*) What I wan' wid dis dirty money? All I want war to see dis fight. To win. (*He flings the money high into the room toward the men*) Didn't I warn yo'? Dar's blood o' kings in me.

[*He opens the door, and goes out. The men scramble for the bills.*

CURTAIN

IT ISN'T DONE
OUTCLASSED

CARL GLICK

Carl Glick is a graduate of Northwestern University. He played a season, 1909–1910, in classical drama with Donald Robertson, at the Chicago Art Institute. The following season he played in a road company presenting "Romeo and Juliet." He has taught dramatic art at Fairmount College, Wichita, Kansas, and was director of the Waterloo Community Theater, the first Little Theater in Iowa. Since that time he has been writing for the magazines under various pseudonyms.

IT ISN'T DONE

A COMEDY

By CARL GLICK

Characters

THE POET

THE POLICEMAN

MR. SMITH

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(Original title, "Prologue")

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Applications for permission to produce "It Isn't Done" should be addressed to Norman Lee Swartout, Summit, N. J. No performance may be given without his consent.

POET. Well?

POLICEMAN. But it's darn suspicious this time of night, you standing there in the rain writing a poem about the stars that you can't see. You're as good as disturbing the peace. I could bring in charges against you, all right.

POET. I haven't said a word to any one but you, have I? I haven't tried to stop anybody? There isn't a citizen in this town whose complacency I have attempted to disturb.

[*We almost imagine that to himself he adds the word "yet."*

POLICEMAN. But how do I know but what you may?

POET. You don't.

POLICEMAN. Anyway, it's time you was going home to bed. You need the sleep if you are going to get up and go to work in the morning.

POET. But I'm not going to work in the morning. I've already decided that. I loathe work.

POLICEMAN (*his eyes narrowing*). Who do you work for?

POET (*naming one of the big stores*). Phillips's Department Store. I'm in the wash-goods department.

POLICEMAN. H'm!

POET. So you see it wouldn't be quite the thing to arrest me, would it?

POLICEMAN. Mr. Phillips is on the city council.

POET. Sure. You'd have to explain to him.

[*He considers the matter closed.*

POLICEMAN. Well, I'll let you stay this time, but don't write any more poems at night.

POET. Thanks — Have a cigarette?

[*He holds out a case.*

POLICEMAN. Nope. Thanks. I smoke segars.

POET. H'm.

[*He turns away.*

The policeman stands scratching his head in perplexity.

At that moment the brisk walk of a young man is heard, and there enters upon the scene a handsome, strikingly virile young fellow. His clothes are well cut. His figure is athletic. He fairly beams prosperity.

POLICEMAN (*recognizing him*). Good evening, Mr. Smith.

SMITH. Oh, hello!

POLICEMAN. Going home?

SMITH. Yes, I've been at the club with some of the boys. We've been having a hand at poker. I cleaned up eight dollars.

POLICEMAN. That's good — Say, Mr. Smith, are you in a hurry?

SMITH. No.

POLICEMAN. Then I'd like to ask you a few questions.

[*They retire to a corner of the stage, leaving the poet alone.*

POET. "Above was the silence of a thousand stars — calm symbols of —"

[*His voice fades away as he writes.*

SMITH (*to the policeman*). What is it?

POLICEMAN. It's about that fellow over there.

[*He points to poet.*

SMITH. Well?

POLICEMAN. He says he's a poet!

SMITH. Poet? Hump! (*He shows great scorn*) Well, what about it?

POLICEMAN. Damn funny his standing there writing poetry at night. I think he's a nut.

SMITH. I'll talk to him. (*He goes up to the poet*) Hello, you. What are you doing here?

POET. Minding my own business. What are you?

SMITH. Don't get fresh.

POET. Don't you!

SMITH. Do you know who you are talking to?

POET. Do you?

POLICEMAN (*interrupting*). This is Mr. Smith, of Smith Brothers Soap Company.

POET. Oh! Never heard of you!

POLICEMAN. He talked just that way to me.

POET. Still, I suppose soap has its uses.

SMITH (*somewhat ruffled. His right to the crown has been*

questioned in the presence of a policeman). I should hope so. Especially if you live in this town.

POET. Towns don't differ.

SMITH. I mean, strange that you never have heard of me?

POET. Have you ever heard of me?

SMITH. No! I'll have to say I haven't.

POET. Well, you may sometime, — when people still use soap.

SMITH. What are you doing, anyway?

POET. Since you already know, I'll have to tell you again. I'm writing a poem.

SMITH (*seeing a glimmer of light, smiles*). Oh, I see. For advertising purposes.

POET (*does not lose patience*). No. Because I prefer writing poetry.

SMITH. Writing poetry at this time of night? Do you make any money at it?

POET. No. Not a cent.

SMITH. Then why do you do it?

POET. Why do you make soap?

SMITH. Why, man, — that's the way I earn my living.

POET. Well, I suppose some one must.

POLICEMAN (*to Smith*). There. What did I tell you. Isn't he a nut?

SMITH (*impatiently*). Just wait a minute. I'll question him some more — (*To the poet*) See here, what are you doing this for?

POET. You mean writing poetry? Writing a beautiful poem about the stars and the town?

SMITH. Oh, you are writing a poem about the town?

POET. Yes. It's going to open people's eyes to the beauty in the commonplace things of the town.

SMITH (*indignant*). Did you know I am President of the Chamber of Commerce?

POET. No! Are you? Still I suppose in a way you are necessary.

SMITH. So what do you mean by saying this town is commonplace?

POET. Well, isn't it? So far as I can discover, I'm the only poet here.

SMITH (*puzzled*). What do you do for a living?

POET. Work. What do you?

SMITH. I'm connected with the Smith Brothers Soap Factory. Then you do this on the side?

POET. Wholly on the side.

SMITH (*turns to policeman*). He's harmless. There isn't any use in talking with him. He doesn't make his living this way, so it's all right.

POLICEMAN. But suppose that other people started to write poetry? Suppose that a lot of people here took it up? See what a nuisance it would be? I think I ought to arrest him for an example.

SMITH. Of course if it becomes dangerous we might pass a law against it. (*Turning to the poet*) What good will it do you, anyway?

POET. No good, probably. (*Sighs*) That's the worst of writing poetry instead of making soap. You see, no one will know I wrote poetry until after I'm dead and buried. Right now the town has the soap factory and the paving and the city council. When I'm dead, they'll find out they had me, too.

POLICEMAN. He's got the swell head.

POET. But it will be too late then. I shall have my triumph nevertheless. I wager I shall be discovered by some one who has never heard of this town before.

SMITH. If he talks like that I don't know but what we ought to shut him up. It might hurt the town. (*To the policeman*) Have you ever had a case like this before?

POLICEMAN. No. That's what so damned funny. I don't know what to do with him.

SMITH. Nor I.

POLICEMAN. If he'd only break a window or rob a store it would be easy enough. But when he just stands there

and talks. Still I think it is dangerous. I guess I'd better arrest him.

SMITH. Go ahead.

POET (*who has been writing his poetry*). "Above the music of a thousand stars." I'm getting it. That's bully. (*Shouting with joy*) "Above the music of a thousand stars. Below the town in slumber sleeps."

[*He hastily writes.*

POLICEMAN (*touching him on the arm*). See here. You are under arrest.

POET. Just a minute while I write these lines. (*He is busy for a moment*) Now what is it? But just listen to this.

POLICEMAN. Now calm down. Calm down!

POET. It's great! Listen!

"Above the music of a thousand stars,
Below the town in slumber sleeps."

Now if I can only get a word to rhyme with sleeps. Peeps? Deeps? Creeps? What do you think?

POLICEMAN (*pompously*). You're under arrest.

POET. For what?

POLICEMAN. For disturbing the peace! Ain't that right, Mr. Smith?

SMITH. It certainly is.

POET. But what will you do with me? And just as I was getting it to come right?

POLICEMAN. Put you in jail. And then in all probabilities make you leave town. We don't want any poets here. Do we, Mr. Smith?

SMITH. We most certainly do not.

POLICEMAN (*to poet*). So come along.

POET. Jail? You know I can write poetry there just as well as here.

POLICEMAN. We'll take your pencil and paper away from you.

POET. Oh, that makes no difference. I can write without those.

POLICEMAN (*in despair*). Say, what are we going to do with you?

POET. If I might make a suggestion?

POLICEMAN. Well?

POET. You might let me go! It's late now. You've spoiled my inspiration, and I don't think I'll be able to write any more poetry to-night.

POLICEMAN. If I let you go, you promise you'll go home to bed?

POET. Yes. To-night!

SMITH (*wisely*). I don't know but what that's the best. He really hasn't done anything you can arrest him for. Now has he?

POET. Have I?

POLICEMAN. No. That's the worst of it. You haven't.

POET. Well, then, are you going to let me go?

POLICEMAN. What do you think, Mr. Smith?

SMITH. I suppose if you arrested him, I'd have to appear against him, and swear to it that he was disturbing the peace?

POLICEMAN. You would.

SMITH. Then, by all means, don't arrest him. Besides, I don't know but what if he writes poetry I might be able to use him.

POLICEMAN (*releasing the poet*). Oh, well. If you can do anything with him, he's yours.

SMITH (*to the poet*). See here, you. If you write as you say —

POET. I certainly do write.

SMITH. Well, why don't you go in for advertising? That's where the money is!

POET. Yes, I suppose so.

SMITH. There isn't anything in this stuff about the stars and the moon. You can't make money by that kind of thing. Now do you?

POET. I'll have to admit I don't. Oh, occasionally I sell a poem to some newspaper. But not very often. I don't make my living that way, you understand.

SMITH. Then why don't you go in for something that pays, — I mean, write the kind of poetry that sells? Now if you

could only write a poem about our soap, — I'd pay you for it. And pay well.

POET (*astonished*). You mean, that I shall write you a poem about your soap — about Smith Brother's Soap — the Soap that cleanses?

SMITH. Exactly. I could use it for publicity. For advertising. I think it might go.

POET (*thoughtfully*). I have never thought before that it would be possible to write a poem about soap.

SMITH. Well, think it over.

POET. You'd pay?

SMITH. Sure. I said so. Pay well. Five dollars a poem, and it might lead to a place in our advertising department at a good salary.

POET. I'll have to think it over. I never thought that this would happen to me.

SMITH (*starting away*). Do you go my way? Walk along and we'll talk it over.

POET. Soap! Soap!

SMITH. Good night, officer.

POLICEMAN. Good night.

[*The poet and Smith move away.*

POET. Soap! Poems about soap! By George, I believe I have an idea.

SMITH. That's good. You'll have to tell it to me.

[*They move on talking.*

The policeman is left alone.

POLICEMAN (*stands for a moment looking after them*). I guess I'd better keep an eye on him. He might do some harm to Mr. Smith. I don't trust these poets.

[*He starts after the poet and Mr. Smith.*

At this point, you might as well drop the curtain.

OUTCLASSED

A MELODRAMATIC COMEDY

By CARL GLICK

Characters

GEORGIE SMITH, a boy of twelve years
EDDIE SIMMONS, his chum
MR. DODGE, their Sunday-school teacher
A TRAMP

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OUTCLASSED

SCENE. *Interior of a barn. But to-night you must pretend that it is a den on the Western plains where a couple of wild and desperate outlaws are hiding.*

AT RISE. *Georgie Smith is discovered. Under ordinary circumstances Georgie is a good boy — that is, as good a lad as a boy of twelve is able to be. He is a born leader, and has an imagination that is the joy and despair of his Sunday-school teacher. To-night he is disguised as a Western outlaw. He is dressed to fit the part: last winter's hat pulled down over his forehead, a soiled handkerchief about his throat, a belt for his revolver — a water pistol — and the rest we must imagine to be what outlaws usually wear. It is evening, about seven o'clock. The scene is lighted by candles placed in bottles. Georgie, or "Kit, the Terrible Sure Shot," as he prefers to be known, is placing an empty bottle on the barrel center which serves as a table. From his pocket he draws out a flask half full of licorice water. This Kit drinks as if it were the rawest kind of whisky. Then he places the empty flask beside the other bottle. Turning away, he takes a few paces to the left. For a moment he is strangely indifferent, then he jerks his revolver from his belt, and with a quick turn shoots.*

KIT (*angrily*). You little son of a gun. Bang! (*He knocks one of the bottles to the floor*) I'll get you and your partner, too. Talk back to me, will you? Bang! (*He turns a complete circle, and shoots from behind his back. He knocks the other bottle on to the floor. He looks at his victims with great disdain, and kicks them*) Huh! Dead, I guess, all right! (*Then the ferocious outlaw, with a modest swagger, goes calmly to a box at the left and sits. There is heard at the door three low, mysterious knocks. Kit pulls his hat over his eyes, assumes a cautious attitude, and answers the signal*

with three raps. Again three knocks upon the door. This time Kit answers with only one. Then he drops behind the box, covers the door with his revolver, and waits. Speaks roughly) Come in! (*The door is opened and Eddie Simmons runs into the barn. He, too, is a desperate outlaw. At least Eddie tries hard to be one. He is dressed somewhat as Kit, although he lacks the finishing touches of the perfect artist. But then Eddie, or "Jip, the Blood," as he is called, is the kind that follows. We can't all be leaders. Jip is really a good boy, and will in time grow up to become a thoroughly respectable member of his community, wave the flag, attend church regularly with his wife and family, and vote the straight Republican ticket*) Throw up your hands!

JIP (*down-stage right*). Don't shoot. It's only me!

KIT (*crossing to him*). Huh! Think I'm afraid of you?

JIP. Georgie — they're after us.

KIT. My name ain't Georgie. My name is "Kit, the Terrible Sure Shot," and always call me that. (*Pokes Jip in the ribs with his revolver*) Throw 'em up. Who's after us?

JIP. Mr. Dodge.

KIT. Think I'm afraid?

JIP. No. But I am.

KIT. Lily-livered rat!

JIP. But I heard them talking over at the post-office. Mr. Dodge was there, and Reverend Taylor came in.

KIT. Who are they to be afraid of? The preacher, and a darn old Sunday-school teacher. Ain't we a couple of desperate Western outlaws that don't know no fear?

JIP. I know. But Reverend Taylor says, "Dodge, there's been a bit of villainy done. The candlesticks have been stolen from the altar of the church." — "Terrible," says Mr. Dodge, "who do you suppose has done it?" — And then they looked right at me.

KIT. And what did you do?

JIP. I just looked the other way and coughed, so they wouldn't think it was me. Then Mr. Dodge says, "Well,

I guess I know who's done it all right. And if we catch them, they'll hang for it." — Then I left. Georgie — (*but when Kit threatens him with the revolver, apologizes*) Kit, let's take them back. They suspect us, I tell you.

KIT. Say that louder.

JIP. Louder?

KIT. Yes, louder!

JIP (*at the top of his voice*). They suspect us, I tell you.

KIT. Ha, ha, ha! You act as if you was ashamed of being suspected. You're frightened about it. I'm proud I stole the candlesticks off the altar of their old church. (*Shouting*) Let 'em suspect me. I wish they would. They've got a right to.

JIP. But they're coming after us!

KIT. Well, let 'em. We're the ones who did it all right. You and me. You watched outside, and I got 'em. We'll show them that we can do as we darn please in vacation time, and I ain't ashamed of stealing them, either. And what's more, we've got them right here in this very cabin. (*Crosses left and pulls the candlesticks out from behind the hay*) And here they are.

JIP. But if they should see us have them?

KIT (*becoming even bolder*). That's just what I want them to do. (*Puts the candlesticks away*) There ain't no use being a bad man unless people knows about it. We've started on a life of crime, and I'm glad. I'm proud of my dirty deeds. I can't be happy unless I'm known as the slipperiest, slickest, toughest, wildest, and worstest desperado in town. (*Crosses right, making violent gestures*) I want all the married women and Sunday-school teachers to be afraid of me.

JIP (*weakly*). But if they should catch us?

KIT (*with great disgust*). I'm ashamed of you. Ain't you got any ideals? What do you want to be? A sissy and play with the girls and go to Sunday school? We're done with that life now. From now on, you and me are outlaws of the worst kind. No more Sunday school, no more having

our faces washed, and no more having to say "Please" and "Thank you." We can swear now!

JIP (*very shocked*). Georgie!

KIT. Don't — don't call me Georgie. (*He throws his hat on the floor and kicks it*) Here's gratitude! After I promised to let you go with me and make you the terror of the whole country — and then, when they shoot me dead, as they will some day, you'll go on and be the leader of my gang. (*Pleadingly*) What's the matter? Don't you want to be a desperate Western outlaw?

JIP (*not as thrilled as he should be*). Ye-e-ss. I want to be an outlaw all right, but I don't want to get caught.

KIT. You're like all the other outlaws. Ain't got no pride in your profession. Just take it from me, there ain't many men can steal candlesticks from a church and get away with it.

JIP. But if ma should find out what you and me has done?

KIT. You ain't got no mother, nor father, nor sisters, nor relations of any kind. You're a desperate Western outlaw called "Jip, the Blood," and you're hiding in a den on the Western plains, trying to escape justice.

JIP (*who is getting less enthusiastic all the time*). I know. And I likes to play with you, and I'm awfully glad I'm a desperate Western outlaw — but I do wish you'd let me take them back. You didn't hear Mr. Dodge talking like I did. I guess you wouldn't be nearly so brave if you heard what he said, and the way he looked.

KIT (*persuasively*). We ain't ever got caught yet. Not even the time we was kidnappers. No, nor the time we was firemen and set the barn on fire. All you got to do is just imagine, and it always comes out all right. (*Brandishing the revolver, and threatening Jip*) Now see here — are you going to play, or aren't you?

JIP. Oh, I'll play all right — but stop poking me with that thing.

KIT. That's good. Then you do as I tells you always, and you'll never get caught. We can defend this cabin against

the sheriff and his posse for days. We're well provisioned. I've got some cookies here, and we can withstand a siege for several weeks.

[*Kit goes to a box and brings forth a cookie. He breaks it in half, and gives part to Jip.*

JIP (*with bravado, and striking Kit on the chest*). Then give me a drink of licorice water, and I'm your man.

KIT. There ain't no more.

JIP. Oh, Georgie, you drank it all up?

KIT. I know. But I've got such a terrible thirst. But we'll make some more to-morrow, and you can have the first drink.

[*There is a firm, decided knock at the door. The boys look at each other speechless. Jip loses his courage. Kit pulls his hat down upon his forehead and tries to look "desperate."*

JIP (*running and hiding in the haymow*). That's him — Mr. Dodge. What did I tell you?

KIT. You big baby. Don't let on. We'll fool him. We'll pretend we don't know him.

[*He tries to pull Jip forth from his hiding place.*

JIP. I'm scared.

KIT. You're a fine desperado. You ought to be playing dolls with the girls. (*With a swagger*) I'm not afraid of any Sunday-school teachers — not even if they bring the sheriff with them.

[*Again the knock at the door.*

JIP. Are you going to let him in?

KIT. Sure. — Come in! Come in! (*The door opens and Mr. Dodge enters. He is a young man with a sense of humor. Nor is he lacking in sympathy. Perhaps he remembers his own youth, and the fact that only the healthy-minded at twelve years of age are in revolt against a too exacting society. He looks around with something of a smile on his face. Jip retreats to the corner. Kit goes bravely up to Dodge and holds out his hand*).

Come on in — stranger. Glad to see you.

DODGE. Thanks. And who are you?

KIT. We're a couple of desperate outlaws. I'm "Kit, the Terrible Sure Shot," and this is my pal, "Jip, the Blood."
[*Jip looks the other way.*

DODGE (*entering into the spirit of the make-believe*). I see! And this place?

KIT. This is our den. And who are you, stranger?

DODGE (*after a slight pause*). I? Oh, I'm just the sheriff.

KIT. Oh! And what brings you out at this time of the night, Sheriff?

DODGE. Business. I'm looking for the thief.
[*Jip groans and sits suddenly upon a box at the left, hiding his face in his hands like an ostrich.*

KIT (*not daunted*). Just what did this thief look like?

DODGE (*glancing at him closely and giving an accurate description*). Short — thin — light hair — face that needs washing — tough — wild and desperate looking.

KIT (*who is seated on a box at the left of the barrel, sinks down lower and lower*). I see.

DODGE (*sits on the other side of the barrel*). I thought at first you might be the thief I was looking for, but I guess I must have been mistaken.

KIT (*straightens up, relieved*). Yes — I guess you must be.

DODGE. You are nothing, I take it, but a couple of Western outlaws, and everybody knows they never steal.

KIT (*disappointed at this bit of surprising information*). Is that so? — But then my pal over there is terrible bad at times.

DODGE (*with a smile Kit does not see*). Yes. I can tell that by looking at him.
[*Jip shakes with fright.*

KIT. What did this thief do?

DODGE. He stole the candlesticks from the altar of the church.

KIT (*painfully sympathetic*). Gosh! You don't say? The candlesticks from the church. Haven't you any idea who the thief is?

DODGE. Yes. We have an idea all right.

[*Jip, who is sitting on the edge of the box, falls off. Kit glares at him, and tries to act unconcerned. Dodge smiles slightly.*

KIT. That's good. He must have been an awful bad man to take things from a church.

DODGE. I gather from the way you talk you go to church.

KIT (*glorying in his supreme moment*). There you made a mistake, Sheriff. I never go to church. I ain't a Christian. I've never been a Christian.

DODGE (*who acts as if impressed*). Dear me, you are worse than I first supposed. Don't you ever even go to Sunday school?

KIT. No. I never goes to Sunday school. (*And growing bolder*) Me and my pal ain't never going to Sunday school again.

[*Jip falls off his chair the second time. He waits in fear and trembling for the worst to happen. But Dodge replies with the unexpected.*

DODGE. I guess you are right. A fellow can't be a desperate outlaw and go to church at one and the same time.

JIP (*cautiously*). What — what will they do with this thief when they catch him? Will they hang him?

DODGE. No. Hanging is out of the fashion now. Why kill all our bad men? What use would we have for lawyers? They don't hang thieves any more. They just cure them by performing an operation of some sort.

KIT (*learning something new every day*). Operation?

JIP (*weakly*). Operation?

DODGE. Yes. They cut off their hands, or feet, and in cases like this, probably their ears.

KIT. I didn't know they did things like that to thieves.

DODGE. Oh, yes. However, if the candlesticks are back on the altar in time for the service Sunday morning, nothing will be said about the thief. (*He rises*) This is a nice den you have here.

KIT. We like it.

DODGE. I suppose you have lived here a long time.

KIT. Yes. Forty years by now.

[*Dodge turns up-stage. The moment his back is turned, Jip, who is standing left before the haymow where the candlesticks are hidden, gestures violently to Kit.*

JIP (*whispering*). Let's take them back.

KIT (*whispering back*). No — no —

[*They keep up this byplay until Dodge turns suddenly. Both boys instantly become quiet, and stand motionless, as if nothing had passed between them.*

DODGE. H'm. This is certainly an interesting place.

[*He makes straight for the haymow. Jip gets out of his way. Kit runs over to Dodge and pulls him by the coat.*

KIT. The door is over this way, Sheriff.

DODGE. Oh, yes, I know. (*He thrusts his hands into the hay, and the candlesticks fall out. Dodge picks them up, and faces Kit sternly*) What are these?

[*An oppressive silence. Then Jip groans.*

KIT (*innocently*). Those? Why, they look like candlesticks to me.

[*His last bluff has gone, and now he waits for the blow to fall.*

DODGE (*slowly*). Yes. They look like candlesticks to me all right. (*After a short pause*) I thought at first they were the ones stolen from the church, but I think I must be mistaken. (*He puts them back and covers them with the hay*) Well, I guess I'll be going on with my search after the thief. If you fellows see him, just tell him what I said about nothing being done if the candlesticks are back on the altar by Sunday morning. (*Crosses to the door and makes an elaborate bow*) Well, good night, "Kit, the Terrible Sure Shot" and "Jip, the Blood."

[*He goes, leaving us with the impression that perhaps, when he gets away from the barn, he breaks into a hearty laugh.*

JIP (*crossing left to Kit*). Oh, Georgie, what did I tell you?

KIT (*at a loss for words*). Huh!

JIP. Let's take them back. You know what he said.

KIT. Take them back? What do you think I am?

JIP. But he knows we've got them.

KIT. Are you sure he knows those are his old candlesticks? He ain't certain.

JIP. But he could have arrested us — and what would you have told him?

KIT. He didn't dare arrest us. He saw my hand on my revolver all the time. If he did recognize those as his old candlesticks, he was too scared to say so. (*With increasing excitement*) He may go after a posse and then come back. That's his game. We've got to get ready. It looks to me like there was going to be a terrible fight right here. But we can defend this cabin against all the men in the State.

JIP. I wish you'd let me take them back.

KIT. You're the weakest desperado I ever saw. Think Jesse James would have you in his gang? Just when you are a success and begin to show people you ain't afraid of them — you want to take them back. Gosh, you make me sick. We're successful thieves, I tell you. I've got a good notion trying taking something from the store. There's an awful lot of lollypops there they'd never miss.

JIP (*desperate at last, but in a different way*). But I don't want to lead a life of crime. (*He goes and gets the candlesticks*) I'm going to take them back before it's too late.

KIT. You big baby! (*He tries to take the candlesticks from Jip. From outside the door there is heard a coughing and a scraping of feet. Jip, in his fright, gives up the candlesticks*) The posse. We are surrounded. It's a fight to the death now! (*He drops behind the barrel, and covers the door with his revolver. The door at the back opens slowly, and a tramp makes his appearance. He is no different from all others of his kind, dirty, slovenly, and altogether undesirable. He comes in, looking around carefully*) Put up your hands.

TRAMP (*for the moment frightened*). I ain't done nothing.

KIT. Come here.

[*The tramp moves down-stage left. When he gets into the light and sees the boys, his amazement grows.*

TRAMP. Oh, gee, nothing but a couple of kids.

[*He lowers his hands.*

KIT (*fiercely*). We ain't. We'se desperate Western outlaws. Put up your hands! (*The tramp obeys*) Who are you?

TRAMP. I'm an I. W. W. — Say, I don't mind youse pretending you're a desperate Western outlaw, but I wish you'd turn that gun the other way. I wouldn't hurt you kids.

KIT. Will you join our gang?

TRAMP (*rather frightened*). I'll do anything you wants me to. But don't point that gun at me. You makes me nervous.

KIT (*with great scorn*). You mean you are afraid of a revolver?

TRAMP. Say, when I get hold of a gun, I ain't afraid of anybody — not even a cop.

KIT. Then you don't like policemen, either, or sheriffs?

TRAMP. The law and me ain't any too good friends.

KIT (*putting away the revolver*). Shake, pardner. We'se fugitives from justice, too. I'm "Kit, the Terrible Sure Shot," and this is my pal, "Jip, the Blood."

TRAMP (*laughing*). Glad to know you. I've heard of your pal here, but I never expected to meet him. Where do you kids live?

[*Jip, frightened by the scrutiny of the tramp, hides behind Kit.*

KIT. Here. This is our den. We ain't got a home.

TRAMP. But what do you do for a living?

KIT. Steal, mostly.

TRAMP. You don't mean it?

KIT. Sure. Want to see our latest haul? (*Crosses left and gets the candlesticks*) These. We got them from the church across the way.

TRAMP. Well, I'll be blowed. I thought you kids was stringing me at first.

KIT. I guess you believe me now, don't you? How would you like to go in with me and my pal? I bet you could tell us some rare stories about a life of crime.

TRAMP. I ain't much on telling stories. Do you kids really mean what you say about making your living stealing?

KIT. Sure. Think I'd lie to you? We even steal our food from the houses about here.

TRAMP. But don't people get hep?

KIT (*his imagination in full play*). Well, you see . . . our father and mother's dead — and they wants to send us to an orphans' asylum — but we slipped away, and hid here.

[*During this speech Jip gestures to Kit in horror.*

TRAMP. I thought you said you was outlaws?

KIT. Being orphans doesn't prevent us from being outlaws, does it?

TRAMP (*beginning to understand*). I get youse. How long you been living here?

KIT. About a week now, ain't it, Jip?

JIP. Ye-e-ss.

[*Tramp examines the candlesticks. Kit crosses to Jip, who is standing right.*

KIT. Why don't you say something?

JIP. Oh, Georgie, I wish you wouldn't tell such lies.

KIT. You make me sick. Here's a chance for a real adventure.

TRAMP (*crosses to them*). Listen, are you telling me the straight goods?

KIT. Sure!

TRAMP. About you being orphans and hiding here?

KIT. Sure!

TRAMP (*carefully*). Suppose I put it up to you to help you get away?

KIT. We've been waiting for the chance.

[*There is a look of horror on Jip's face.*

TRAMP (*lowering his voice to a whisper*). If you kids will help me out on a little deal, I'll see to it that by to-morrow morning you're a hundred miles away, and then — no orphans' home for you.

KIT. It's a go with us!

JIP (*pulling at his sleeve*). Oh, Georgie, don't.

TRAMP. I know of a chance to make a big haul. You kids help me, and we'll split fifty-fifty. Are you in?

[*The boys stare at each other. Even now Kit is beginning to remember his home training.*

KIT. Are you on the level?

TRAMP. Dead level. I know how we can make a crack at the safe in the store. I was by there this afternoon.

KIT. You mean take money from the safe?

TRAMP. One of youse watch outside, and I'll do the trick. There ain't nothing to it in these country stores.

KIT. You've done it before?

TRAMP. I ain't saying. But if you kids is game!

JIP (*his courage suddenly deserting him*). I'm going home, Georgie.

[*He starts for the door.*

TRAMP. What's that?

JIP. I ain't going to be a thief!

[*Tramp catches him by the collar and brings him down-stage.*

TRAMP. Are you kids stringing me? I suspected as much. So you've got a home?

JIP. Yes. And we ain't orphans, and we ain't outlaws. We're just playing. Let go of me! Ouch!

TRAMP (*releasing him*). I might have known. But them candlesticks?

JIP. We took them, all right. But it's the first time we ever stole anything. It was Georgie's idea. He didn't want to go to Sunday school any more. Oh, I wish I'd never played outlaws with you, Georgie.

KIT (*with great disgust*). He ain't got no nerve, nor imagination, nor nothing!

TRAMP. Well, kids, have a good time while you're at it.

[*He picks up the candlesticks.*

KIT (*forgetting that he is a Western outlaw*). What are you going to do with those?

TRAMP. Take them as my share.

KIT (*experiencing a strange emotion — the conflict between being a radical and refusing to bow to conventions, and the realization of the duties and responsibilities of leadership*). Where are you going with our candlesticks?

TRAMP. You'll find out to-morrow.

[*The side to Kit's nature that will some day make him realize*

his citizenship responds. With a flying leap he trips the tramp just as he is about to leave the barn. They go down to the floor in a heap. The candlesticks drop from the tramp's hand.

TRAMP. You little devil.

KIT. Take 'em, Jip, take 'em! (*Jip gets the candlesticks and runs out of the barn, trotting to the church as fast as his fat little legs will carry him. On the floor Kit is pounding the tramp*) You'll take our candlesticks, will you?

TRAMP. Let go of me.

[*Dodge appears in the door. He comes in.*

DODGE. What's the racket? (*He pulls Kit off the tramp*).

[*The tramp rises slowly from the floor, looking dazed and bewildered.*

TRAMP. I ain't done nothing. I was just having some fun with the kids.

DODGE. What's the trouble, Kit?

KIT (*trying to look unconcerned and coming down-stage left*). Nothing.

[*The tramp makes for the door. Dodge seizes him by the collar.*

DODGE. Wait a minute. (*To Kit*) Was he trying to take the candlesticks?

KIT. What candlesticks?

TRAMP. I wasn't going to take 'em.

DODGE. Where are they?

[*Jip comes running in, smiling, happy, and conscience free. He comes down-stage and makes a gesture to Kit that the candlesticks are safe.*

KIT (*understanding Jip's signaling. And also the outlaw again*). I don't know nothing about your old candlesticks. Why don't you look on the altar where they belong. That's where they ought to be, ain't it?

TRAMP. I was only fooling.

DODGE. You can explain later. And now you boys had better be running home, or your mothers will be worrying. I'll take care of this fellow. (*He starts to the door, still holding the tramp by the collar*) And you boys had both better come to Sunday school, Sunday.

KIT and JIP (*together, politely*). Yes, sir. Thank you, sir!

[*Dodge and the tramp exit. For a moment Kit and Jip stare at each other weakly. The thought of what they have escaped is too overwhelming for words. Then Kit revives suddenly.*

KIT (*fiercely*). You're a hell of an outlaw.

JIP. Georgie, you're swearing!

KIT. Aw, go home, or I'll be doing something reckless. (*Then he throws his arm about Jip affectionately*) But I guess we landed a tramp all right. I bet they put him in jail. Well, he ought to be, trying to take our candlesticks. Let's go home!

[*Kit blows out the candles. The boys move toward the door.*

JIP. What'll we play to-morrow night?

KIT (*after a moment's consideration, says as one inspired*). Aw, let's be convicts!

[*They leave the barn, nice boys again — until to-morrow night, and there is no telling what will happen then.*

The Curtain Falls.

THE HAND OF SIVA

KENNETH SAWYER GOODMAN

Kenneth Sawyer Goodman was, at the time of his death, one of our most promising dramatists. He was born in 1883 and died in the Naval Service, 1918.

In 1911 he organized The Stage Guild and became its director. He wrote, alone or in collaboration, about thirty one-act plays, among them "The Wonder Hat," "The Hero of Santa Maria," "The Game of Chess." The Stage Guild has just issued his plays in two volumes under the title "Quick Curtains,"and "More Quick Curtains."

BEN HECHT

Ben Hecht was born in New York City in 1893. At seventeen he graduated from the Racine High School and shortly after secured a place on the staff of the *Chicago Journal.* Later he joined the staff of the *Chicago Daily News.* His two novels "Erik Dorn" (1921) and "Gargoyles" (1922) have placed him definitely in the van of the younger American novelists. His play "The Egotist" was produced this year by Leo Ditrichstein.

THE HAND OF SIVA

A MELODRAMA

By KENNETH SAWYER GOODMAN
and BEN HECHT

Characters

HENRI DUROT, an Officer in the French Secret Service
CAPTAIN ASHBY, of the Anglo-Indian Army
MAJOR WELLINGTON, attached to the General Staff
KODAH KAHN, a Sepoy Sergeant
MAHIB, Ashby's native orderly

TIME: Evening of a September day, 1914
PLACE: Within the Allied lines

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Applications for permission to produce "The Hand of Siva" should be addressed to Norman Lee Swartout, Summit, N. J. No performance may be given without his consent.

THE HAND OF SIVA

Time, evening of a September day, 1914. The Place is Captain Ashby's room in a small French hotel, occupied by officers of an Anglo-Indian regiment. The room, which looks as if it might once have been the lounging or writing room, is comfortably furnished. There is a door at the left into the hall and a pair of French windows at the back opening upon a veranda or terrace. At the left is a fireplace with a fire burning. Before the fire are two armchairs; the larger one has its back to the window. Beside it is a light table large enough to play cards on. In the center of the stage is a large desk table littered with books and papers. There are one or two other small chairs, a washstand and Ashby's cot bed, which is in the corner between the door and the window. There are two electric lamps with colored shades which when lighted give the room a very subdued and cozy aspect. The French windows have curtains of a thin material shirred on to the sash. There is a tray with a bottle and glasses on the desk, also a tin of cigarettes, matches, etc. On one of the small chairs near the door is a violin case. When the curtain rises, the room is dark except for the light from the fire and a little dull moonlight coming through the French window, one side of which is open. Ashby enters from the terrace, goes rapidly to the desk, and begins fumbling through the papers. He strikes a small bell then goes to an electric switch behind the mantel and turns it. It lights the large lamp on the desk and a smaller one on the mantel. A native orderly enters by the door at the right.

THE ORDERLY. The sahib rang?

ASHBY. You were here when Sergeant Chundra Das brought me a big blue envelope.

THE ORDERLY. Yes, Sahib.

ASHBY. What did I do with it?

THE ORDERLY. The sahib put it on the corner of the table. I saw it there when the sahib had gone.

ASHBY. Hmm! That's all I wanted to know.

THE ORDERLY. The sahib has other orders?

ASHBY. You can bring up some coffee.

[*The orderly salutes and goes out. Ashby resumes his search.*

DUROT. Good evening, Captain Ashby.

ASHBY (*looking up with a start*). Hullo, Durot. I didn't hear you come in.

DUROT. Lost something?

ASHBY (*pulling out the desk drawer*). A blue envelope. Rotten carelessness, of course. Thought I slipped the damned thing into my pocket. Never missed it till I went over to headquarters after dinner.

DUROT. You've looked everywhere?

ASHBY. Gad, yes. But I'll just run through once more on the chance.

DUROT. I wouldn't trouble to if I were you. You will get it back in an hour, possibly sooner.

ASHBY (*straightening up*). You think it was taken, do you?

DUROT. I don't think, M'sieur, I know. The affair has all the earmarks of the best Prussian technique.

ASHBY. Well, I must say you're damned unconcerned about it.

DUROT. On the contrary, I've spent the best part of six days trying to unravel a series of similar thefts. There have been three known cases and probably a dozen unreported since your division went into camp.

ASHBY. See here, old chap, I've only the most casual acquaintance with you. All I know is that you're supposed to be a French Captain, detailed with this regiment as a military observer. I'd like to know first where you come in on this.

DUROT. You've heard the old adage "set a thief to catch a thief."

ASHBY. Then you've —

DUROT. I am helping M'sieur, with the further assistance of a benign Providence and your own somewhat heavy-handed intelligence officers, to locate a light-fingered gentleman who tampers with the secret correspondence concerning the condition and morale of the British Colonial troops.

ASHBY. That may all be, but I'll trouble you to —

DUROT. If you insist on my credentials, Captain Ashby, I advise you to call up headquarters at once and report the entire affair, unless you prefer to wait and get the blue envelope back without risking a reprimand for losing it.

ASHBY (*taking up the 'phone*). Reprimand be damned! I'll just call up Fitzmore and see what he makes of all this. Hullo! No, I want Division Headquarters.

DUROT (*continuing as if his speech had not been interrupted*). And perhaps our ruthless Prussian friend into the bargain. What do you say?

ASHBY (*turns and hammers hook*). All right, operator. Never mind. — Confound you, if you know who has the envelope, why don't you say so?

DUROT. My dear fellow, don't be too literal. Your reports were taken anonymously and will doubtless be returned without signature.

[*The orderly enters noiselessly with tray and a coffee percolator with a lighted lamp under it.*

ASHBY. By George, this idea of spies did get on my nerves.

DUROT. It needn't, unless I am very much mistaken. All we need is a little patience.

THE ORDERLY (*after setting the tray on the smaller table*). The sahib's coffee. The sahib has other orders?

ASHBY. No, unless Captain Durot wants to ask you some questions.

DUROT (*coolly*). Thanks, I've already talked to your orderly.

[*The orderly salutes and goes out.*

ASHBY. Well, by gad, would you mind telling me when you talked to my orderly?

DUROT. This morning, when I was looking into a little experience reported by Captain Bivert upstairs.

ASHBY. Then you mean that Bivert —

DUROT. Quite so. The cases are exactly alike. Only Bivert's missing reports had already been found when I got there. They were gone just three quarters of an hour.

ASHBY. You've been damned quiet about the whole thing.

DUROT. Quiet, M'sieur, is an almost indispensable attribute of my profession.

ASHBY (*looking toward the door through which the orderly has just disappeared*). You seem pretty certain Mahib wasn't mixed up in it.

DUROT (*seating himself in a chair by the coffee tray*). One must never be too sure of anything, M'sieur, but if I were looking for a safe bet, I'd offer you odds that the man we're looking for is a commissioned, or at least a non-commissioned officer.

ASHBY (*walking up and down nervously*). Rotten business! It makes you feel as though you couldn't trust your own best pal. Why, there isn't a chap in the regiment I wouldn't have staked my life on.

DUROT. At any rate, there's no point in working yourself into a stew about it. Let me pour you a cup of coffee.

ASHBY. Perhaps you're right, but it seems as if we ought to be doing something.

DUROT (*as he pours coffee*). You might begin by shutting those windows while you're up. There's a devil of a draft here.

ASHBY. Certainly.

[*He goes to the window, shuts both sides of it.*

DUROT. Sugar?

ASHBY (*still at the window*). No, thanks. I'll take mine clear.

DUROT (*rising*). That's yours then, on the arm of the big chair. (*Going to the mantel*) If you don't mind, M'sieur, I'll switch off these lamps. The glare seems to hit me in the eyes.

ASHBY. Suit yourself, of course.

[*He sits down in the larger chair with his back to the French window and takes up his cup of coffee.*

DUROT. I can somehow think more clearly in the dark. (*He switches off the electric lamps, leaving the room lighted only by the glow from the fire*) Perhaps now, if we put our heads together, M'sieur.

[*Durot remains standing beside the fire with one elbow on the mantel. He is facing Ashby and is consequently where he can keep his eyes on the French windows.*

ASHBY (*stirring his coffee*). Fire ahead. It's all beyond me.

DUROT. To begin with, what was the name of the native sergeant Ferguson told us about the other day, the religious fanatic?

ASHBY. They're all religious fanatics, more or less.

DUROT. I mean the fellow they say spends all his spare time hanging around the wounded German prisoners, as if he might be looking for some one.

ASHBY. By Jove, why didn't I think of that devil before! Come to think of it, I saw him loafing in a doorway across the road when Wellington and I went over to breakfast this morning. He sort of faded away directly he saw us. I'll bet you five pounds to five francs he's the man we're looking for.

DUROT. At least he's one of the men we're looking for, Captain Ashby.

[*The shadow of a man appears on the curtains of the French windows.*

ASHBY. He's a First Sergeant, Cameron's Company Second Regiment, enlisted from Rangoon district, Burmah. His name is Kodah Kahn. I'll 'phone Cameron and have him sent over. It won't do any harm to have a look at him.

[*He is about to get up and go to the 'phone.*

DUROT (*in a whisper*). Quiet! There's somebody at the window now.

[*He takes Ashby's wrist.*

ASHBY. If the fellow's come back, he'll get more than an envelope this time.

DUROT. Hush! Get as close to the window as you can. When he gets into the middle of the room, I'll switch up the light.

[*Durot stands with his hands on the switch. Ashby begins cautiously making his way toward the window but knocks against a chair which falls over with considerable noise. The shadow disappears from the window.*

ASHBY. Damnation.

[*He snatches a revolver from his holster and rushes to the window.*

DUROT. It's no use. He's heard us.

ASHBY. By God! I'll have a look at him, anyway.

[*Durot switches on the light. As Ashby almost reaches the windows, they open and Major Wellington appears on the threshold.*

WELLINGTON (*suavely*). So there you are! Thought perhaps you'd turned in. I was just coming along when you flashed your light.

ASHBY (*taken aback*). Hullo, Wellington! I say, by Jove, do you know we almost made a —

DUROT. Captain Ashby and I were just wondering where we'd pick up a third at cards.

ASHBY (*confused*). Er — exactly. You chaps know each other, don't you?

DUROT. I've met Major Wellington at headquarters once or twice.

WELLINGTON (*advancing into the room*). How are you, Captain Durot? (*He offers his left hand*) Pardon my left hand.

DUROT. It is a compliment, M'sieur. In my country we give the left hand to our friends because it is nearest the heart.

WELLINGTON (*looking at Ashby, who still holds his automatic revolver in his left hand*). I say, Ashby, you weren't looking for a card partner with that automatic, were you?

ASHBY (*flustered and realizing for the first time that he still has*

the weapon in his hand). Er — no — Fact is, we're in the devil of a mess here. I was 'phoning Fitzmore at headquarters, but Durot's got some silly ass idea of his own.

WELLINGTON. About what?

ASHBY. Let me take your overcoat first. There, we'll all sit down to a peg of something and talk it over.

[*He starts to help Wellington off with his military overcoat.*

WELLINGTON. Go a bit easy, will you? I've got a queer kink in my right arm. Gets bothersome dark nights. Deucedly thick outside.

DUROT. Yes, regular Burmah weather.

WELLINGTON. Burmah weather? What's that?

ASHBY (*as he throws Wellington's coat over back of a chair*). Didn't know you'd been in the East, Durot.

DUROT. I haven't, but I thought perhaps Major Wellington —

WELLINGTON (*picking up a cigarette from the table and lighting it*). You've got me there. I've never been east of Cairo myself.

DUROT. Then you're as ignorant about the ways of these Sepoys as I am.

WELLINGTON. Don't know a thing about them except what I've picked up lately.

ASHBY. Major Wellington was transferred to us on staff duty from England.

DUROT. They don't interest you, perhaps.

WELLINGTON. Not particularly.

[*There is a sound of native drums from the encampment. It continues off and on throughout the rest of the play.*

Wellington seems somewhat unpleasantly affected by the sound of the drums. He lays down his cigarette and begins pouring himself a glass of brandy.

DUROT. But their music — the drums especially. There's something wonderful about it, you can't deny that.

WELLINGTON (*pulling himself together*). Can't say I've ever paid much attention to their drums.

DUROT. Of course, it's a matter of taste.

WELLINGTON. I suppose so. (*He tosses off his brandy*) Um! That's better.

DUROT. How about a rubber of three-handed auction?

WELLINGTON. I'm game.

ASHBY (*without much enthusiasm*). Right-o!

WELLINGTON. What was it you said, Ashby, about being in a mess? What sort of a mess?

ASHBY. There's no use beating about the bush, Major. I've lost an envelope full of special correspondence.

WELLINGTON. Hmm! That's bad. I suppose you've reported to the old man, haven't you?

ASHBY. Not yet.

WELLINGTON. Well, then, take my advice and wait until morning. There's no use letting yourself in for a wigging until you're sure they don't turn up safe and sound.

ASHBY. I'm afraid there's no question about what's become of them.

WELLINGTON. You mean you think there's been something irregular?

DUROT. On the contrary, M'sieur, everything has been according to time-honored procedure of the Prussian Spy Bureau. There is no telling how many times the ruse may have been worked successfully.

WELLINGTON. What ruse do you mean?

DUROT. The ruse of returning a lost paper before the owner has missed it, or at least soon enough to make him think it has only been mislaid. There also seems to be a natural reluctance which prevents certain gentlemen from reporting such temporary absences.

ASHBY. Devil of a trick, eh? He says this is the third known case since Sunday.

WELLINGTON. I don't quite follow you. Third known case of what?

DUROT. Your war office has been getting exhaustive data covering the condition and morale of the Indian troops. These detailed reports, mostly written in Hindustani, are made out by trusted native officers who go about among

the men and pick up all sorts of camp talk. It's important for your generals to know the weak spots in any unit; just where hidden discontent may be smouldering; just which ones are apt to stand to the bayonet and which aren't. It's equally important for the enemy to know the same thing.

WELLINGTON. By gad, I must say you seem to be pretty well informed.

ASHBY. Captain Durot is detailed by the French Intelligence Department to help our own men.

WELLINGTON (*to Durot with a slight sneer*). I didn't know that secret agents were in the habit of being quite so delightfully frank.

DUROT. The nature of the case, M'sieur, determines the amount of secrecy required. I have sometimes obtained excellent results even after admitting my identity and mission to the suspect himself.

WELLINGTON (*apparently much amused*). And so you are sitting in the dark, eh? Waiting for a guileless Prussian spy who speaks Hindustani?

DUROT. The idea seems to amuse you.

WELLINGTON. It strikes me as damned grotesque, to say the least. Sort of thing I used to read about in penny dreadfuls. However, it's quite out of my line.

DUROT. Exactly.

WELLINGTON (*speaking more briskly*). Come, let us get to playing. I must knock off at ten-thirty sharp and write up reports.

ASHBY. You'll find a deck of cards on the desk.

DUROT. There are no cards here, M'sieur.

ASHBY. Hell, I could have sworn I saw them there, when I was pawing over the papers, the last clean deck.

DUROT. Shall I ring for your orderly?

WELLINGTON. Don't bother. I've some new decks in my own room. I'll run up and get them; only take me a minute.

ASHBY. Hate to trouble you.

WELLINGTON. Not at all.

[*Wellington goes out by the hall door.*

ASHBY. Devil of a nice chap, Wellington.

DUROT. Undoubtedly.

ASHBY. Mustn't mind if he chaffs you a bit sharply about the secret service. It is a little irritating to you, y' know, to have an outsider called in. Looks as if our men weren't up to their work, rather.

DUROT (*picking up a violin case*). I didn't know you played the violin, Ashby.

ASHBY. I don't. The thing belongs to Wellington. Bought it or borrowed it, I don't know which. Seems to have a perfect passion for playing the damned thing.

DUROT. Hmm, that's very interesting.

ASHBY. Gad, you'd think it was a child the way he takes care of it. Always leaves it either here or in Bivert's room, because he says his own room's too damp.

DUROT. Exactly. Where is his room, by the way?

ASHBY. Almost directly above. He ought to be back by now.

[*The door opens. Wellington enters with two decks of cards in his hand.*

DUROT. Speaking of the devil —

WELLINGTON (*tossing the cards on the table*). A blue deck and a red deck, both brand new.

DUROT (*laughing*). Reckless extravagance. One might almost think he was in his own club at home, eh, Captain Ashby?

ASHBY. Yes — if it wasn't for this infernal —

WELLINGTON (*sitting down at the table*). Come, come, let's try to forget about your blue envelope for a few minutes.

ASHBY (*still thinking of the lost papers*). Hindustani isn't a very popular language. Most of our younger officers can't read a word of it. That pins it down pretty close.

DUROT. At least it excludes Major Wellington and myself.

WELLINGTON. If I was in your place, Ashby, I'd take a chance on searching every one of these confounded native orderlies.

DUROT. Whoever the spy turns out to be, gentlemen, he's too clever to let us catch him with anything in his possession. You can count on that.

[*The orderly enters from the hall.*

THE ORDERLY. Sahib.

ASHBY. Well, what do you want now?

THE ORDERLY (*advancing and extending the blue envelope*). The sahib's blue envelope. I find him just now, in hall near by door to terrace.

[*Ashby takes the envelope and glances into it.*

DUROT (*glances at his watch*). Ah, less than fifty minutes. They work with absolute precision, eh, Major?

ASHBY. Gad, not one missing!

WELLINGTON (*lighting a cigarette*). It's an even money bet you dropped it there yourself.

ASHBY (*to the orderly*). How many men have been through the hall since dinner?

THE ORDERLY. I not know, Sahib. Officers, perhaps five or six. Myself, perhaps other orderlies. I not know how many.

ASHBY. You haven't noticed any one from the outside hanging about, any other native officers, for instance? (*The orderly appears to hesitate*) Well, why don't you answer me?

THE ORDERLY. Subidar Kodah Kahn, to ask for Captain Cameron, Sahib.

[*Ashby and Wellington glance at each other.*

ASHBY. Subidar Kodah Kahn, eh?

DUROT. Where is he now?

THE ORDERLY. When I tell him Captain Cameron no here, he go back toward cantonment, Sahib.

ASHBY. By gad, that fellow knew Cameron was on duty at headquarters from eight to ten.

WELLINGTON. Steady, now — steady.

THE ORDERLY. The sahib has orders?

DUROT. Go into the hall and wait. We may want to send a message.

[*The orderly salutes and goes out.*

WELLINGTON. Well?

ASHBY (*with conviction*). We've got him. There's no question about it.

[*Wellington appears slightly amused.*

DUROT. Major Wellington is still skeptical?

ASHBY. But the devil of it is how to get the beggar dead to rights.

WELLINGTON. If you want my advice, you'll 'phone Fitzmore and have this Kodah Kahn put under arrest without evidence.

ASHBY. It will kick up the deuce of a row with the natives if we arrest him and fail to prove what he's been up to.

DUROT. Perhaps.

ASHBY. By gad, Durot's right, all the same. (*He strikes a bell*) We cannot afford to make a mistake.

DUROT. If he is, I promise you gentlemen he shall leave the room without any idea that he is under suspicion.

[*The orderly enters. Durot takes out a notebook and pencil and writes rapidly.*

THE ORDERLY. The sahib rang?

ASHBY. Captain Durot has some orders for you.

DUROT (*folding his slip of paper*). Take this to cantonment and find Subidar Kodah Kahn. Tell him the French sahib wants to talk to him in Captain Ashby's room. Tell him to wait on the terrace till we call him in.

ASHBY. You understand?

THE ORDERLY. Yes, Sahib.

[*He salutes and goes out.*

WELLINGTON. Ridiculous! I'll take you for a guinea apiece that Durot fails to land his man.

DUROT. Done!

ASHBY. Just time for one rubber before they get back.

DUROT (*spreading one of the packs face down on the table*). Low deals. Sixpence a point.

WELLINGTON. Short and sweet, eh?

DUROT. One never knows, M'sieur, when we shall have another opportunity of playing together. (*Each man has*

drawn a card and thrown them face up on the table) Ashby gets it.

[*Ashby sits down to deal. Wellington rises and goes to the center table and pours out another tall glass of brandy and soda. Durot goes to the mantel and takes a cigarette from a tray and lights it. The native drums begin again, louder than before.*

ASHBY. There they go again.

[*He begins to deal.*

DUROT (*listening and watching Wellington*). Drums. There's nothing in the world like drums. I've heard Russian drums in Manchuria. I've heard native drums in West Africa. I've heard Bulgarian drums and British drums and Italian drums. It's the same everywhere. They get under the skin of civilization. They give you the real savage soul of the devils that play on them or march to them.

ASHBY (*listening*). That's a sort of a religious ritual they're at now.

[*He goes on dealing.*

DUROT. I can readily believe it, M'sieur. I can almost see the priests making ready for the sacrifice in some hidden temple.

WELLINGTON. Beastly din, I call it. Gets on a fellow's nerves. It's worse than shrapnel.

ASHBY. Imagine what it does to chaps that have to fight 'em in their own country. How would you like to be out in the hills as I've been, with a corporal's squad and not another human being in sight for miles, and all the time hearing their infernal drums from every point of the compass so close you thought you could almost touch them?

DUROT. Or worse still, to fall into their hands, and if they had a particular grudge against you —

WELLINGTON (*with an attempt at a laugh*). I must say you fellows are in a pleasant frame of mind to-night.

[*He picks up his cards.*

ASHBY (*counting his cards*). Sorry, but I've got fourteen cards. Will you draw or make it a new deal?

WELLINGTON. Make it a new deal.

DUROT (*as Ashby gathers up the cards for a new deal*). I was thinking about a yarn I once heard. It might interest you, Major Wellington. There was a German Secret Service agent who gave violin lessons in Rangoon ten or twelve years ago —

ASHBY. If you mean the Von Frantzins' case, I was stationed in the Rangoon district at that time myself.

DUROT. Then perhaps you could tell us what he looked like.

ASHBY. Never happened to see the poor blighter.

DUROT. But you can tell us what happened.

ASHBY (*beginning to deal*). I'd rather hear your own version of it.

WELLINGTON. The French version of the adventures of a German spy related in an English camp?

DUROT. Exactly, M'sieur, with a few Hindoos thrown in for good measure. Quite apropos under the circumstances.

WELLINGTON. I'll take your word for it.

DUROT. This Von Frantzins came to Burmah and lived as an Englishman at Rangoon. He was a remarkable linguist, spoke several native dialects. He'd have got through with his work, which was a study of the reorganization of the Indian Army, if he hadn't taken to an equally intimate investigation of the Brahmin temples.

ASHBY. To make it short, the silly fool violated one of them.

DUROT. They caught him red-handed in the sanctuary and he dropped out of sight.

ASHBY. Gad, there was something of a scandal. We thought he was English, y' know.

DUROT. They took him back in the hills, if you know what that means.

WELLINGTON (*slowly*). No. I don't know what it means.

ASHBY. It means being subjected to every kind of mental and physical torture, but never actually killed outright. The thing only happens once in every three or four years,

and it's generally hushed up because they never get any direct evidence. But I could tell you stories that would make you shiver for a week at the sight of a white turban.

[*The figure of Kodah Kahn, a tall Sepoy in a white robe, appears at the French window. Both Ashby and Wellington have their backs toward the window. Durot is facing the window. His eyes meet those of the Sepoy but he gives no sign of seeing him.*

WELLINGTON. You needn't, thanks.

DUROT (*watching Wellington more closely*). It seems the victims are always mysteriously returned to their friends, Major Wellington. I suppose as a sort of warning.

WELLINGTON. Come back like Ashby's envelope of reports, eh?

[*Durot strikes a match and lights the lamp under the percolator.*

DUROT. But with this difference, — Captain Ashby's blue envelope was unharmed.

ASHBY. While the poor wretches we're telling you about were invariably stark, raving mad and usually died in a week or two.

WELLINGTON. And I suppose this Von Frantzins —

DUROT. No, I believe he is the single exception that proves the rule.

ASHBY. Perhaps it is a bit harder to unsettle your Prussian's reason than it is your Englishman's.

DUROT. Perhaps. At any rate, as I happened to find out while on duty inside the enemy's lines, not so very long ago, a gentleman of the same name is at present one of the most highly trusted agents of the Prussian Secret Service.

WELLINGTON (*with a slight sneer*). I begin to see the connection. A Prussian spy who speaks Hindustani like a native, eh?

DUROT. You get my point exactly.

ASHBY. All the same I wouldn't care to be in his shoes, wherever he is.

DUROT. Nor I. If Herr Von Frantzins ever goes to India again or if India ever comes to him — the result is apt to be rather ghastly.

WELLINGTON. What do you mean when you say "if India ever comes to him?"

ASHBY. You can't conceive the appalling patience of the Oriental mind. Why, Cameron tells me that some of his older men, recruited from the Rangoon district, still talk about Von Frantzins. He's often caught them at it. They seem to think it is only a matter of time before some Brahmin ferrets the poor blighter out and sticks a knife into him.

DUROT. Ferguson tells me they even examine the dead in front of the trenches and the wounded in the field hospitals.

WELLINGTON. Huh! There's precious little chance. He may have changed a good deal in ten years.

[*The drums, after having ebbed away, become louder.*

DUROT. I don't think they depend on recognizing his features, Major Wellington.

WELLINGTON. What do you mean?

DUROT. There's probably something else, some sort of mark they put on him years ago. I think they call it the Hand of Siva.

WELLINGTON (*repeating the words slowly as if fascinated against his will*). The Hand of Siva.

[*The figure of the Sepoy again appears at the window.*

ASHBY. Yes, that's it. Rummy sound to it, eh? The Hand of Siva! I saw it once myself on a poor devil of an Irish Lieutenant.

WELLINGTON. Then you know what it looks like.

ASHBY. Well, rather. It's like the print of an iron hand burned right into the flesh of the right forearm just below the elbow. You couldn't mistake it in a thousand years, or get rid of it if you had it on you.

[*At some point during the preceding speech Durot has taken up one of the empty coffee cups and filled it from the coffee*

percolator. He now stands beside Wellington with the coffee cup in his hand.

WELLINGTON (*laying down his cards*). You will excuse me. gentlemen, but a story like that —

ASHBY. Leaves a bad taste in your mouth, eh?

DUROT. Try this cup of hot coffee, M'sieur.

[*Wellington pushes back his chair and Durot, with a seemingly awkward movement, overturns the cup of coffee on Wellington's right forearm and wrist.*

ASHBY (*as Wellington rises with an exclamation of pain*). I say, what are you doing?

DUROT. A thousand pardons, M'sieur, I have hurt you.

WELLINGTON (*grasping his right wrist with his left hand*). It's nothing. It's of no consequence.

ASHBY. By Jove, that stuff must burn like hot lead. Roll back your sleeve, old chap.

DUROT. It was infernally awkward of me.

WELLINGTON. I'm quite all right, thanks.

ASHBY (*going to the table as if to strike the bell*). I'll call Mahib. Wonderful chap, Mahib. He'll fix you a dressing that'll take the sting out of your arm in twenty seconds.

WELLINGTON (*controlling himself with difficulty*). No! no! — I tell you it's nothing. I prefer to fix it myself, thanks, later.

DUROT. I insist upon helping you, M'sieur, as a penance.

WELLINGTON (*almost savagely*). Keep your hands off me, can't you?

ASHBY. I say, there's nothing to fly in a fit about.

WELLINGTON (*regaining control of himself*). Sorry, but my nerves are a bit ragged. Stomach, I think, ruined. Fact is, I can't bear to have any one touch my skin. You'll have to excuse me.

ASHBY (*a little doubtfully*). Of course, if that's the way you feel about it.

DUROT. I understand, M'sieur, perfectly.

[*The figure of Kodah Kahn disappears from the window.*

WELLINGTON. Sorry to break up the game before it begins, but if — if you don't mind, I think I will turn in.

DUROT. You won't wait and help me thresh out this little business of the envelope with Kodah Kahn, then?

WELLINGTON (*quite himself again*). No, thanks. I think I've had about enough for one evening.

[*He picks up his coat and cap and takes a step or two toward the hall door.*

DUROT. You will find Mahib waiting in the hall if you change your mind about having that arm of yours looked after.

WELLINGTON (*stopping and apparently deciding not to go through the hall*). Don't think of it again. I'll just step out on the terrace for a breath of air before I go up. Good night, gentlemen.

DUROT. Pleasant dreams.

ASHBY. See you in the morning.

[*Wellington goes out by the French window*

DUROT. Well?

ASHBY. He wouldn't let you touch his arm. I say, you know there's something —

[*There is a scream from outside.*

ASHBY. What's that?

DUROT (*seizing Ashby's arm*). Quiet. Be still!

ASHBY. Let me go!

DUROT. It's the end of the story, M'sieur.

ASHBY. You mean that Wellington —

DUROT. The man who just left this room was Von Frantzins —

ASHBY. By gad, I don't believe it. I —

[*He breaks away from Durot and runs toward the window. Before he reaches it Wellington staggers backwards into the room with one sleeve of his coat completely torn away. He sways for a moment and then falls in a heap before Ashby, clutching his feet. The figure of Kodah Kahn appears in the window. He is wiping a native knife on the sleeve of his robe.*

DUROT. Well?

KODAH KAHN. Look at his arm, Sahib. The French sahib made no mistake.

ASHBY. By gad, what's the meaning of all this?

KODAH KAHN (*speaking quite calmly as he thrusts the knife into his girdle*). Your pardon, Sahib, for the disturbance, but I have just met an old friend.

CURTAIN

ACTION!

HOLLAND HUDSON

Holland Hudson brought from California so lively an interest in the art of the theatre that after some preparation in a dramatic school he served, in and out of New York, four years' apprenticeship as actor, stage manager and director. He brought to the Washington Square Players, with whom he was associated for three years, the skill and background necessary to stage some of their most effective productions, and the originality to write for them the now popular pantomime "The Shepherd in the Distance."

The war brought him into Federal service, where he is still employed as an industrial investigator. He has written several plays for little theatres, among them "Pearl of Dawn," included in "Twenty Contemporary One-act Plays — American." No doubt the plot of "Action!" was suggested by some part of his official experience.

ACTION!

A MELODRAMATIC FARCE

By HOLLAND HUDSON

Characters

The Stage Manager
The Rowdy
Mr. Max
George Max, his son
Two Loft Workers
Two Bootleggers
Two Dry Agents
Two Patrolmen

Time: The present
Place: New York City

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Applications for permission to produce "Action!" should be addressed to the author's representative, Frank Shay, care of Little, Brown, and Company, Boston, Mass. No performance may be given without his consent.

ACTION!

When the customary curtain signals have been given, the stage manager, an apparently unsophisticated young man, appears before the curtain. His coat is off; he seems nervous and exceedingly ill at ease. His voice is at first insufficient for the requirements of the theatre.

STAGE MANAGER. Ladies and gentlemen, owing to the limited facilities of our stage —

A ROWDY VOICE (*interrupting, from the back row of seats*). Louder!

A FRIENDLY VOICE (*from the third row*). Speak up, Fred. We can't hear you.

THE STAGE MANAGER (*slightly irritated, in a more robust tone*). All right! All right! You all know what a small stage we have?

THE ROWDY. Boo — ooh! Never mind your stage! What about your acting? What about your plays?

THE STAGE MANAGER (*has one of those personalities which achieve their maximum power in moments of anger, and he is now very angry. He steps close to the edge of the stage; his voice rings out crisply and resonantly*). I'll answer those questions, young man, little as they deserve it. I'm aware that ours is not a professional company, sir; but I'll match its acting against any other group of equal experience. So much for the acting. Now, as to the plays. We have tried to give you the best plays available. Our selection has been adversely criticized.

THE ROWDY. Too bad!

THE STAGE MANAGER. It is not too bad that we are criticized, but it *is* too bad that our critics see fit to remain anonymous. (*He produces a great roll of letters from an inner pocket with a flourish*) Letters like these, ladies and

gentlemen, pour in every day — unsigned. They are differently worded and in different handwritings, but their import is the same. I suspect — mind, I accuse no one — that the source of their inspiration is not far from here.

THE ROWDY. Well, what are you going to do about it?

THE STAGE MANAGER. We're going to do this about it: I'm going to read one of these letters to this audience — the least offensive one — and then we're going to stage a play written to satisfy these anonymous critics, little as our stage is adapted to such productions. Here's the letter:

"The trouble with you people is that you're afraid of anything with red blood in it. The characters in your plays come on the stage and talk — when they don't forget their lines — and nothing ever happens. When some jokes occur in the dialogue, you call it a comedy; and when the author has no sense of humor, he calls his play a drama. Do you really think your plays are lifelike? The lives of your play-reading committee may be like that; but your plays show how little you know of real life, where things *happen* every day, — big, interesting things, with a thrill in them. If you'd quit reading psychoanalysis, and look into the daily newspapers instead, you'd soon find out what I mean."

The play you are about to see is our answer to these letters. Just one word more —

THE ROWDY. Boo-ooh! Get off the stage and give the actors a chance!

THE STAGE MANAGER (*snapping back into high gear*). I won't get off the stage because I'm here for the sole purpose of giving the actors a better chance. Now, if our young friend will allow me, I simply want to say regarding this very thrilling play that the author's scene-plot calls for a whole floor in a New York loft building. Through the window at one end, he says, you can see the night traffic on the Hudson; through the other, the somber ribbon of the East River, and beyond that the lights of Brooklyn. Then,

he says that at one end of the loft is a small office. We can show you the office. But he says that the floor of the loft is covered with hundreds of big packing cases. Well, we'll show you all the packing cases we have room for. That's the best we can do. Each of them must serve as a symbol for fifty more packing cases, — an indication or suggestion, if you please. It's all we have room for, and I dare say most of you will find it sufficient. You may also find a few other things slightly toned down; but you'll know why and what to do about it. That's all, thank you. [*He disappears.*

The curtains part, disclosing, principally, two large packing cases marked "Max & Son, New York City." The sender's address is in Chinese characters, but the word "Silks" appears under them, in English. The only other properties consist of a small and flimsy safe, lettered "Max & Son, Silks" and a small table at which Samuel Max, senior member of the firm, is at work under a drop-light. Max is a middle-aged, energetic little man with an habitual expression of bland good humor. He moves in a quick and birdlike manner.

The telephone bell rings.

MAX (*looks at the instrument with distaste; glances at his watch, and answers the second ring*). Well? . . . What is it? . . . Yes, Max talking . . . The Silk Association at this time of night? . . . Well, what do you want? . . . All right, Mr. O'Brien; I believe you . . . My number? Greeley 4685 . . . Oh, you mean my code . . . It's 2-Z-H-T . . . Now you believe me, huh? . . . Did I call you up this afternoon? No, I didn't . . . Why should I ask you that when I already know the car numbers of my shipments? . . . No; how should I forget that? . . . What did you tell him? . . . You did, heh? . . . Well, listen, O'Brien; don't feel too bad about that, because those numbers I gave you ain't the numbers of my car . . . No . . . Oh, no; I didn't make no false report; I just gave you the numbers in code, see? . . . No, they won't mean nothing to no goopher . . . Have you got track of those

five cases that were missing from my last car? . . . Insurance? No, I don't need any insurance. Those five cases were filled with rags. . . . What? . . . Oh, the other cases, the ones that came through all right, — they were marked "Sardines" . . . The five cases? Oh, they were marked "Silk" . . . That's cheaper than insurance . . . That's all right, Mr. O'Brien. Very good of you to call me up. (*He hangs up the receiver and goes back to work. A knock is heard at the door nearest him*) Come in!

[*A well-dressed young man responds to the invitation. His vest is conspicuously adorned with the wings of an aviation pilot.*

WELL-DRESSED YOUNG MAN. Well, papa?

MAX (*rises and stares incredulously, then embraces his son, who reciprocates with genuine affection*). My boy, my boy! Why didn't you let me know?

YOUNG MAX. It would have spoiled the surprise. I like surprises.

MAX. And the little wife you wrote me about, George? Is she also a surprise?

GEORGE. Every day, papa. (*Handing his father a photograph*) Meet Mrs. Max, Jr.

MAX. You did very well, George. I couldn't have done better for you myself.

GEORGE. Sure you're not disappointed?

MAX. No; you never disappoint me — except when you didn't come home after the armistice.

GEORGE. I couldn't, papa. I had just got my wings. It cost the army forty-five thousand dollars to make a flyer of me. Could I throw that away right off quick?

MAX. Forty-five thousand dollars? Well, maybe not; maybe not.

GEORGE. So when I was discharged I got the Curtiss agency and sold planes and taught flying. That's how I met Esther, down in Palestine.

MAX. You wrote me something about that, but you wrote so bad I couldn't read it much.

GEORGE. Well, there was an Arab down there who had me come all the way from Paris with a plane for him. He was a Sheik — you know what that is?

MAX. Sure; we have them in movies, sometimes.

GEORGE. Well, he had made some money out of the war — or stolen it from some one who had. He was Esther's guardian; and he stole all her father left her, too.

MAX. Wait a minute; let me get this right. How did the Sheik get to be Esther's guardian? Aren't these Sheiks *goyem?*

GEORGE. Well, you see, her papa was a Zionist. He went to Palestine and took her along. The Sheik got her papa's watch back for him when it was stolen and pretended to be his friend. Her papa thought he was honest and consented that he should be Esther's guardian because he thought with a Sheik she would be safer. Well, the Sheik wanted a light bombing plane so he could exterminate some other Sheik. He couldn't get it from the British and so he sent for me.

MAX. I hate to interrupt so much, — but did you get your money?

GEORGE. Sure, F.O.B. Detroit; C.O.D. Jerusalem. — Well, when he got the plane he wanted me to teach him how to fly it. Knowing how the British felt about his having it, I didn't like the idea. But then I met Esther.

MAX. Then you changed your mind, eh? I couldn't blame you for that.

GEORGE. The Sheik saw what a hit she made with me so he let me see lots of her. So I visited the British command and had an understanding and after that the Sheik and Esther and I went out on the desert a way and I taught him the gas engine and ground school work while Esther and I got better acquainted.

MAX. George, I'm afraid you cheated that poor fellow.

GEORGE. Oh, no; I really taught him. He'd make a fine aviation mechanic, too. But he was impatient to get up in the air. So, one day, when I couldn't keep him down

any longer, we went up five thousand feet. Well, we did a few Immelmans, a side-slip, a falling leaf and a nose-dive and made a smooth landing. Then, while his men put him to bed for the day, Esther and I beat it in a British army car that just happened by, if you know what I mean.

MAX. You surprised that old fellow, didn't you?

GEORGE. That's the best thing I do.

MAX. Well, I got a surprise, too, for you and Esther. Look here.

[*He points to the safe door.*

GEORGE. "Max & Son!" Why, papa, I never did anything for the business.

MAX. All the same you're a partner — full half interest when you begin.

GEORGE. Begin what?

MAX. Selling silk, of course.

GEORGE. But, papa; I don't know anything about silk!

MAX. There's plenty of people in the silk business who don't know anything about silk. If they did, I couldn't make so much money.

GEORGE. But with my engineering education —

MAX. If you could sell airplanes you can sell silk. There's more consumer demand.

GEORGE. Well, you know I'd like to be with you, papa, but —

MAX. But what? That's what I want to know. If it is better for you to do something else I'll have to change my plans. But is it better?

GEORGE. Not better, perhaps, but —

MAX. Can you make more money some other way?

GEORGE. Perhaps not.

MAX. Can you make as much?

GEORGE. No.

MAX. That's settled then. It isn't the money. That helps. We're getting somewhere. Perhaps you think the silk business is too slow for you, eh?

GEORGE. Well, —

MAX. Ah, now I am getting closer; no? Listen; in such

things it is better to be frank with the old man and now is the time to say it. Do you think this business is too slow?

GEORGE. Well, you know, I'm peculiar, in a way.

MAX. Yes, I know that.

GEORGE. I wouldn't have made the trip from Paris to Jerusalem if my customer hadn't been an Arab Sheik. And who knows — maybe if I'd found Esther, perhaps, in a respectable Jewish family, instead of with this crooked old Sheik — maybe I wouldn't have looked her over so carefully and would have missed something.

MAX. Well, now we begin to talk sense. What is it you want?

GEORGE. Action. That's it, papa; I want action. You see, if I had been in the ordnance it might have been different; but in the aviation there was always something doing and I've had action and more action ever since the armistice. It's got into my blood, papa: — I've got to have it.

MAX. All jazzed up and no place to go, eh? Well, so that's the trouble, is it?

GEORGE. That's it, papa. Now honestly, can you see me selling silk?

MAX. Listen: action ain't only to be found in Palestine. A man of action finds it anywhere.

GEORGE. How d' you mean?

MAX. Well, you know how some fellows never can get action — not even in a crap game. Other fellows get action even running a sewing machine in a pants factory. It depends on the fellow. Now, take the silk business. Silk is a peculiar line, — full of surprises. Do you remember when all the girls had to have georgette waists whether they could afford to wear anything else or not? Mostly they couldn't afford nothing else and the underwear trade nearly went broke. Then, all of a sudden, georgettes wasn't nearly so stylish and we could all see the receiver's shadow on the door. Well, one day my salesman persuaded the underwear people to make georgette combinations and the business was saved. Georgette undies are now the thing for the hope chest and while there's life there's

hope. — That ain't all, neither. Let me show you something.

[*He takes a bolt of silk from one of the packing cases and removing the paper from one end of the board upon which the silk is wound, takes out a small paper package which he unrolls under the light, disclosing a number of unusually large pearls.*

GEORGE. Jiminy! Where did those come from?

MAX. Sshh! Not so loud! (*Yet Max speaks loud enough to be heard anywhere in the loft*) Those came from the Polynesians.

GEORGE. Were they smuggled?

MAX. Certainly not. I would have nothing to do with such a business.

GEORGE. Then I don't see why —

MAX. Of course you don't. Listen: I'll tell you. The Jewelers' Association learned that there was a plan to rob the express shipment in which these pearls were to come here, so as soon as they had passed the customs at San Francisco, they had my agent there ship them to me in this way.

GEORGE. But isn't a lot of silk stolen from freight cars?

MAX. Sure, but not my silk.

GEORGE. What's to prevent any gang of crooks from stealing these pearls from your office?

MAX. Look, should loft burglars break in here they would look for silk, — maybe a few hundred dollars' worth. They would never think of thousands of dollars' worth of pearls in my safe.

[*He locks the pearls in the safe.*

GEORGE. Not much of a safe, papa.

MAX. That's just it; — nobody would think of looking for anything valuable in that old tin can. (*Someone rattles the outer door*) Sshh! Something funny here. We'll hide at the other end of the loft.

[*He pushes George energetically before him and both crawl into the packing case nearest the safe.*

Nothing happens at the door, but — two loft burglars emerge from the packing case farthest from the safe.

FIRST LOFT BURGLAR (*who carries a bag of tools*). Quiet, Mike. The old geezer went up to the other end of the loft. Keep an eye out for him while I open the can.

MIKE. Make it snappy.

[*He trains an automatic pistol on the packing cases.*

First burglar attacks the safe with a substantial tool.

MIKE. Not so noisy, Jack. — How's it coming?

JACK. A cinch.

[*He opens the safe and pockets the package of pearls.*

The outside door rattles.

MIKE. Cheese it. Get in the box over there and don't get gay with your gun unless they find us.

[*Both burglars crawl into the case farthest from the safe.*

The outside door is opened, admitting two men with grips.

FIRST MAN. I didn't see nobody watchin' us.

SECOND MAN. Well, I did. We gotta ditch the stuff until to-morrow night.

FIRST MAN. Where'll we put it?

SECOND MAN (*going to the box nearest the safe*). In here.

[*Opening his grip, he takes out bottle after bottle of amber-colored liquor and hides it in the box while his companion follows suit.*

Again the outside door rattles.

FIRST BOOTLEGGER. Ssst! Here comes somebody.

SECOND BOOTLEGGER. The other end of the loft, quick!

[*Both men crawl into the case farthest from the safe.*

Two prohibition enforcement officers enter the loft cautiously.

FIRST PROHIBITION ENFORCEMENT OFFICER. What would they be doing in a silk loft?

SECOND PROHIBITION ENFORCEMENT OFFICER. Hiding the hootch where you'd never expect to find it.

FIRST PROHIBITION ENFORCEMENT OFFICER. There's no cupboards in here.

SECOND PROHIBITION ENFORCEMENT OFFICER. All right.

Go take a look at the broom closet in the hall while I look around here.

[*First prohibition officer disappears.*

Second prohibition officer lifts the lid of the case nearest the safe and reaches in.

FIRST BOOTLEGGER (*standing up in other box with his automatic trained on the officer*). Put 'em up, quick. (*Second prohibition officer promptly complies. First bootlegger climbs out of the box and comes around in front of the officer. Second bootlegger also climbs out and covers the officer with his automatic*) How far have you followed us?

PROHIBITION OFFICER. All the way from the boat.

FIRST BOOTLEGGER. I've a good notion to plug you.

PROHIBITION OFFICER. You'll go to the chair if you do. Five of us saw you and Jake leave the boat. Better be sensible.

FIRST BOOTLEGGER. Do you want us, or the hootch?

PROHIBITION OFFICER. Both.

FIRST BOOTLEGGER. You can have the hootch. Now, how much will console you if we get away? Two hundred?

PROHIBITION OFFICER. Four hundred.

FIRST BOOTLEGGER. You damned hog!

PROHIBITION OFFICER. And four hundred for my partner.

FIRST BOOTLEGGER. You'll answer for him?

PROHIBITION OFFICER. He'll be all right. Make it snappy. He'll be back soon.

FIRST BOOTLEGGER. It's robbery, but we got another shipment waitin' for us.

[*He extends a roll of bills.*

Prohibition officer reaches toward the bills, grabs the bootlegger's wrist and throws him to the floor.

SECOND BOOTLEGGER (*shoots the officer, who crumples on the floor*). Grab that money and beat it.

FIRST BOOTLEGGER. I'm goin' to frisk this dick's badge and do a little high-jackin'.

[*He stoops over the body.*

First loft burglar raises the lid of the packing case and looks out. He closes it with a bang.

Second bootlegger turns at the sound.

FIRST PROHIBITION ENFORCEMENT OFFICER (*slips silently into the room with drawn automatic*). Put 'em up!

[*Both bootleggers put up their hands, the first bootlegger rising to his feet.*

PROHIBITION OFFICER. You've croaked Bill, have you?

FIRST BOOTLEGGER. No, only creased him. He's breathin' all right.

[*Prohibition officer kneels to put his hand on his partner's heart.*

First bootlegger jumps at him.

Prohibition officer shoots and kills the first bootlegger, then rises to face the second.

Second bootlegger and prohibition officer fire at the same time. The prohibition officer is killed. The bootlegger drops his gun and clasps his right hand in a frenzy of pain, then, picking up his gun with his left hand, hides beyond the case farthest from the safe, after turning off the droplight over the desk.

Two patrolmen burst in with no particular caution.

FIRST PATROLMAN. I don't care what the sergeant told you. There's somethin' goin' on up here. (*His flash light falls on the dead bodies*) Turn on the light, quick. There's hell to pay.

SECOND PATROLMAN (*turns on the droplight*). Who are they?

FIRST PATROLMAN. This guy's a prohibition dick. Look at this bird.

SECOND PATROLMAN. He ain't no loft worker. He's just a plain bootlegger. This guy's another dry agent.

FIRST PATROLMAN. Well, all this is what happens when you take the beer away from the workingman.

SECOND PATROLMAN. Yep; prohibition certainly has put a stop to crime. Let's get back on the beat.

FIRST PATROLMAN. Wait a minute; wait a minute. Somethin' phoney here. (*He has discovered the open safe*) Some guy opened this with a can-opener.

SECOND PATROLMAN. Wasn't no bootlegger, neither. Here's his tools.

FIRST PATROLMAN. Hey, we gotta scatter. You go downstairs and I'll take the roof.

[*He whispers to the second patrolman.*

SECOND PATROLMAN. All right.

[*Second patrolman leaves the room.*

First patrolman follows him to the door, then, dropping suddenly to his hands and knees, he crawls stealthily into the shadow of the nearest box.

First loft burglar (Jack) emerges from the packing case where he has been hiding. He darts immediately between the two cases.

Second loft burglar (Mike) climbs out of the case and starts toward the door.

FIRST PATROLMAN (*from his hiding place, showing a pistol barrel around the corner of the box*). Stick 'em up, Mike. The house is pinched.

[*Mike elevates his hands.*

Where's the other guy?

MIKE. I'm workin' this trick alone.

FIRST PATROLMAN (*crawls out of his hiding place and approaches Mike*). Put on these bracelets while I find friend Jack.

[*Jack shoots the patrolman.*

FIRST PATROLMAN (*staggering*). You will, will you?

[*He shoots and kills Mike before he drops.*

Second patrolman runs into the room, shooting Jack as he turns toward the door. He then tiptoes across the room, looking for another target.

The surviving bootlegger shoots the second patrolman as he nears his hiding place and then bolts for the door.

Second patrolman raises himself on one elbow, shoots and kills the bootlegger, and dies.

MAX (*climbing out of the packing case and making for the telephone, grumbling the while*). What a mess; what a mess!

[*George climbs out of the case and looks over the bodies.*

MAX. Spring six thousand.

GEORGE. Papa, what about the pearls?

MAX. Woolworth's best. Never mind them.

GEORGE. But, papa, you said —

MAX. I know what I said. I got to protect my silk, somehow. Hello . . . Police headquarters? . . . This is Max and Son, on Thirty-Eighth Street. There's been a little shooting. . . . Ambulance? No, that's not big enough. No; you better bring a truck. (*He hangs up the receiver*) Well, how do you like the silk business?

GEORGE. Marvelous! When do I start?

CURTAIN

PRODUCTION NOTE: This should be played with the feverish intensity of our contemporary crook drama. The packing cases, of course, are provided with unseen rear exits. The pistols, particularly in the case of small auditoriums, should be munitioned with a roll of caps. H. H.

THE ALCHEMIST

BERNICE LESBIA KENYON

Bernice Lesbia Kenyon was born in 1897, and has lived most of her life on Long Island and in New York City. She graduated from Wellesley College in 1920 and while an undergraduate did reporting and wrote special articles for the *Boston Transcript*, and began publishing poems in the magazines. She helped to write, direct, and take part in many dramatic affairs at college, and in her senior year produced "The Alchemist" and won the Masefield Poetry Prize. After leaving college she joined the staff of *Scribner's Magazine*, and has published poems, as well as reviews and essays, in most of the leading periodicals. Her first book of poems, "Songs of Unrest," was issued in 1923.

THE ALCHEMIST

A PLAY

By BERNICE LESBIA KENYON

Characters

THE ALCHEMIST
FELIX, his servant, a young boy
FRANCESCO, his wealthy patron
LODOVICO SFORZA, Duke of Milan, called IL MORO
TWO SERVANTS of the Duke

TIME: The Fifteenth Century
PLACE: Milan, Italy. A place near the Duke's Palace

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No performance of this play, either amateur or professional, may be given without previous arrangement with the author or her agent, Norman Lee Swartout, Summit, N. J.

THE ALCHEMIST

A dark and dingy room, finished in smoky black wood. It might be oak. It is very old. At the back of the stage is a window looking out upon the street, and to the left of it the street door, heavy, oaken, with great hinges of tarnished brass. To the right of the window, and at right angles to it, is a curtained doorway leading into an inner room, whose corner juts out, making the right stage much shallower than the left. Front, right, a heavy dark, low table, and behind it a low bench, set against the wall of the inner room. Above the table, on the right wall, a high small window. The table is spread with dingy, much-scrawled charts, and set with chemical apparatus. Left, front, a tripod with a brazier of live charcoal, above which is a crucible of molten metal (silver). On the left wall are shelves littered with scrolls, books, and many small bottles and jars of bright-hued chemicals. Papers are scattered about the floor and under the back window. The irregular mass of chemical apparatus on the table catches light, as do the larger tubes and retorts hung on the walls, over faded and stained charts of astrological symbols. Books are stacked in corners on the floor.

As the curtain rises the Alchemist is seen sitting on the bench behind his table, to the right of the stage. He is figuring laboriously at some charts and chemical formulæ. He is old, over sixty, and looks tired and discouraged, by the lines in his face — as if he had never known ease. His clothes are dingy and shabby, his beard and hair mussed. He moves jerkily.

ALCHEMIST. Ho! Felix! Boy, where art thou? Come within.
(*Enter Felix from the inner room at the left. He is a youth of about fourteen, slight, and meagerly dressed*)
And bring me down the ancient volume there —
With the bronze clasps. So. Place it here. 'Tis well.
Here there is written by an ancient hand

How men sought to make gold in ancient times
Out of all baser metals. They have failed,
Leaving us nothing but these faulty plans. . . .
Can I succeed, or must I sleep at last,
The gold unfound, even as this old seer? (*A pause*)
Felix!

FELIX. Aye, Master.

ALCHEMIST. Come and read for me.
Your eyes are clearer. Read a line or two
Of this — here — where the words are done in red.

FELIX (*reads slowly*).
It says: "All men shall know discouragement,
Yet none shall fail or taste of last despair
Save by the evil of his ways. Therefore
I live to-day glad of the search begun,
Even though I should perish ere I find
The secret of the gold —"

ALCHEMIST. It is enough.
Well hast thou read. . . . But what a hope is set
In these few words. . . . I am discouraged past
All gladness and all hope. There is no end
To my long search. Is this not "last despair"? . . .
Yet I have kept my peace with men and state,
And served my patrons with a willing hand.
Now all have left me but Francesco. He
Will come, perhaps, and laugh, and urge me on
Even as in the past. He is the last
Resource of my old days — the last of all
Save you, perhaps, my Felix, who can bring
Hope to my work again. If he should fail —
Leave me, forsaken of his patronage,
That were the end of all things. Yet I know
He will not leave me, — he that is my friend. . . .
Also, he hopes for gold —

FELIX (*at back window, looking out*). Francesco comes,
Master. His blue cloak flutters in the wind.
He has two servants, bearing torches —

ALCHEMIST. Then
All will be well for yet another night.
Go, Felix, and unbolt the door for him.
[*Felix unbolts the door, and steps aside. Francesco enters alone, leaving the torchbearers outside. He is a courtier, a man of about thirty-five, graceful, easy. He is dressed elaborately, and wears a heavily wrought silver chain over the red velvet of his doublet.*
FRANCESCO. Well, Alchemist, how fare the tests to-day?
Have you transmuted all the elements,
And made me gold from lowly clay and sand?
(*Looks at Alchemist closely*)
Oh, be not so despairing. There is time!
Have we not years to make the tests succeed?
Have I not wealth enough to fill with coins
A hundred crucibles like this, and still
Miss none of it, and fill them yet again?
Have I not copper, yea, and plenty gold
To melt up in our great experiments
Until we learn its secret properties?
(*Looks at papers on the table*)
What have you here? A score of formulæ
As yet untried? Good! I shall send you tin (*looks close*)
And — copper for them all. Who knows but one
May prove successful?
ALCHEMIST. But you do not know
That life may fail before I try them all.
Now for these twenty years all work was vain
To find your gold for you. Perhaps sometime
You, too, may weary of experiments.
FRANCESCO. I weary? Nay!
ALCHEMIST. Yet now for many years
My tests have failed you.
FRANCESCO. My good foolish friend,
Your years were all well spent, nor shall I grow
Any less eager for our great success.
Come, show me what strange tests you made to-day.

ALCHEMIST (*wearily*). To-day I tried these four new formulæ.
Most worthless all. And that upon the flame
Needs yet more silver.

FRANCESCO. Take this silver chain
And melt it up.
(*Takes off his chain and gives it to the Alchemist, who examines it closely*)
If it is not enough
You shall have more to-morrow.

ALCHEMIST. But, my lord,
It is too fine a thing —

FRANCESCO. Why hesitate?
I gave it you for melting. (*Takes it from the Alchemist*)
Thus it goes
Into the crucible. . . . Perchance you know
That chain was wrought by Master Muzio
Of Venice. 'Twas fine work, and skillfully
Designed with all those dainty arabesques
That lie a-melting there. . . . But let them go!
The thing was only silver.

ALCHEMIST. You would scorn
The gold itself, if we discovered it.

FRANCESCO. Nay, I keep all my scorn for other things —
First, for the Duke, with whom I dine to-night,
Then for a score of nobles, with bland smiles,
And words of praise for Lodovico's ears.
(*He walks toward the back window. The Alchemist watches him*)
Oh, how I hate their faces and their words!
Across the tables laden with rich wine,
They smile and praise and smile, till you should see
Il Moro's small eyes glitter with delight.
Sometimes I think he marks my silences,
And wonders why I praise not, like the rest.

ALCHEMIST. You are not wise to sit too silently.

FRANCESCO. Then think you I will praise him out of fear?

ALCHEMIST. You dine with him for fear —

FRANCESCO. What, out of fear?
Take care —
ALCHEMIST. Yet is it true. You know it well.
FRANCESCO. I know it? Why, I fear no man on earth.
Why should I fear? I do no evil thing.
A man comes not to any injury
Save by his own ill-doing. Wherefore fear?
For though I stand alone against the State,
Shall not my virtue triumph?
ALCHEMIST. Well you know,
For all your scornful speaking of the Duke,
You do his bidding, ever, out of fear.
FRANCESCO. Wouldst take upon yourself to bid me cease?
To hold me back? To tell me "Stay apart"?
Who, then, are you? An alchemist — a man
Tired with his search for gold in baser stuff —
Grown old at mixing common metals up,
And dabbling in blue fire —
ALCHEMIST. Good my lord —
FRANCESCO. I will not listen to an old man's talk
Who knows not what he says —
ALCHEMIST (*slowly*). — I say you fear
The Duke as much as do all other men.
You who are strong and young could well afford
To speak your mind before him —
FRANCESCO. Do I not?
Think you my silences are signs of fear?
ALCHEMIST. Why speak you not your scorn?
FRANCESCO. O foolish man!
I will not listen to you. . . . (*To Felix*) Boy, run out
And call my torchmen.
[*Felix goes.*
ALCHEMIST. Oh, most cowardly
Are you who see your way yet do not dare —
FRANCESCO. You call me coward?
ALCHEMIST. Aye. As a good friend —
As an old man, and loving virtue well,

I call you coward to spend night and night
Dining with Lodovico, the proud Duke,
Il Moro, hated by all honest men.
Would that I had your chance for one short night!
Why does your boldness never push you on
To strike him dead, since you can hate him so?
[*Door opens, showing the Torchbearers. Enter Felix.*

FRANCESCO. I am no coward that I strike him not.
The time has not yet come —

ALCHEMIST. Why, any time
Will serve for killing.

FRANCESCO. It were dangerous —
Mad — foolish. I'll no more of this. (*Angrily*) Farewell!
Go find you other patrons! And pay heed:
If you can value life at your old age,
Be silent with your treasons.
[*Goes out, attended by Torchbearers. The Alchemist stands looking after him for a long moment.*

FELIX (*timidly*). Master — Master —
Think you Francesco will return no more?

ALCHEMIST. I know not, Boy. Since I have angered him,
He may forsake us. Then we have no way
Even to find us meat to live withal. (*Musing*)
Long years ago it seemed I could not live,
Sorrowing for my Nina. Then my son
Taken for treason. . . . Then the boldest men,
Patrons of other years, passed by for fear
Of danger in my plans against the State.
Only Francesco came, whom I thought bold;
He was so young, and like another son,
So that I loved him — hated his slow ways —
Would urge him on to daring, even as I
Would dare if fate gave chances. . . . Now to-day
It seems that I have trusted him too much. . . .
How shall we live, my Felix, life being nought
But day on day of dark discouragement?
(*He rouses himself from his mood*)

Yet must I hope for gold, for then perchance
Francesco may return. Why should I fail?
"All men" — what said the sage? — "shall sometime know
Discouragement; but none shall taste despair
Save by the evil of his ways." And so
I must keep hope to find the gold, and win
Francesco to new boldness. . . . (*To Felix*) Fetch me lights!
The darkness creeps in swiftly, and blots out
These crooked figures. . . . So. Place that one here;
And fill the brazier with new fire. It seems
The old is useless. . . . Bring me water, too. . . .
Alas, I am athirst for other things
Than water — oh, for many other things
Than gold and power —

[*Enter Lodovico Sforza, from the street doorway. He wears a dark cloak, which he holds partly over his face.*

LODOVICO. Do not all men thirst
For what they have not?

ALCHEMIST (*rising, hiding some astonishment*).
So, 'tis you, my lord.
Duke of Milan, I pray you come within.

LODOVICO. You know me?

ALCHEMIST. Yea.

LODOVICO. And how?

ALCHEMIST. How should I not?
My lord is known to all men.

LODOVICO. Even so.

ALCHEMIST. But is my lord not bold, to come alone
And dare the intrigues of seditious night,
Set, as are traps, to catch him in the dark?

LODOVICO. What know you of seditions? Speak!

ALCHEMIST. The Duke
Knows more of plots than does the alchemist,
Who can but watch and listen.

LODOVICO. Yet you hear
Some words which may not reach me. Speak!

ALCHEMIST. My lord
Knows that a ruler has his enemies.
LODOVICO. And 'tis of one that I would speak to-night.
He is too bold, and has too keen a voice.
Men listen to him, and he loves me not,
But spreads his thoughts among my trusted lords
Till I trust no one. . . . Also he has lands
Much needed by the State. His vineyards stretch
For miles across fair valleys. These I need
To make me wine for worthy men. (*Pause*) Wherefore
I have resolved that he shall speak no more
Against the State and Lodovico's fame.
And so I come, seeking you privately,
That you may give me somewhat of your power
To make immortal one more mortal thing.
ALCHEMIST. What mean you?
LODOVICO. So you do not understand?
I would obtain a potion of dark death —
Four drops of golden poison in a vial —
There is a sort —
ALCHEMIST. You want a poison?
LODOVICO. So.
Even the same as once you gave to me
On that fair August evening that saw out
The noble life of Guido. (*Smiles and muses*) . . . How his eyes
Grew to a brightness as he drank that wine!
Truly the beauty that was part of him
Blazed to a radiance I never saw
In any man before. . . . It was a charm —
A beauty-charm you gave me, Alchemist. . . .
And when he died, 'twas not in agonies,
But by a drowsy spell, as if he dreamed
The gates were opened on some new delight
Greater than any life had granted him. . . .
Thus would I rid me of mine enemies!

And so, give me four drops of golden death,
Here in this golden vial.
[*Holds out a small vial.*

ALCHEMIST. My lord commands —
Yet can I not obey him.

LODOVICO. Wherefore, now?
Have you no golden poison? Answer me —
I wait!

ALCHEMIST. My lord, I speak, though it be bold:
I like not this —

LODOVICO. What say you?

ALCHEMIST. Poisoning
Is an unhappy way to end one's life.
Were it not better to bring up to trial
Fairly, this foe to you and to the State?

LODOVICO. Peace. 'T is my way to poison. Better far
Than any trial it is, for silently
And secretly it works. . . . The hour grows late.
I'll have my way. Give me the poison!

ALCHEMIST. Nay —

LODOVICO. Wherefore stand there? Have you no poison, then?

ALCHEMIST. Yea, I have plenty poisons.

LODOVICO. Bring them out!

ALCHEMIST. I do the bidding of no man on earth.

LODOVICO. You would defy me? Foolish man, beware.
My servants wait without.

ALCHEMIST. They could do little
To a poor man — a poor, old alchemist.
I fear them not.

LODOVICO. Give me the poison. Haste.
I cannot wait. My friends are banqueting;
I must return and join them.

ALCHEMIST. Go your way
And get your poison elsewhere.

LODOVICO. It is late —
Come, trifle not. I'll have what I desire.

Yea, and I'll pay you well for it — in gold —
In very many pieces — your old eyes
Have never seen so many! I shall send
A coffer of gold, if you but do my will.

ALCHEMIST. I do not want your gold. I shall make gold,
So that your own will pale for very shame
Beside it!

LODOVICO. Boasting? So! Show me that gold!
Show me a little of it! Ah, poor man,
Better live out your life in sweet content,
Rich in the gold I give you, than die here,
And sorrowing in failure.

ALCHEMIST. "None can fail
Save by his evil deeds —"

LODOVICO. What is this talk?
Shall I call in my servants?
[*He takes the Alchemist by the arm, and shakes him roughly.*

ALCHEMIST (*with dignity*). Good my lord,
Forbear —

LODOVICO. Then get the poison. Foolish man,
If you refuse, it is a simple thing
To call my men to me, and bid them bind
And carry you away. Then leisurely
I might explore your poisons, till I found
The golden wine of immortality.
Do you prefer that I should pay you well?
Think of the life of ease — of pleasant days
Far from these labors — in a world remote,
Where you could dwell in comfort year on year. . . .
Give me the poison.

ALCHEMIST. Now, alas, my lord —

LODOVICO. Get me the poison! Come, I'll show it you.
(*He leads him roughly over to the shelf on the left wall*)
Tell me, is this the stuff?
[*Takes down a bottle.*

ALCHEMIST. My lord, — No, no!

LODOVICO (*takes down another*).
Is this? Speak! Tell me!
ALCHEMIST. No, I will not tell you —
Not for the comfort of your chest of gold,
That is a sorry metal to my own —
You look at me — the poison? No, my lord,
It is not —
LODOVICO. Then is this? Why cast you down
Your eyes so stupidly? What then is this?
Answer! . . . Oh, now I see you cannot play
The clever game at all! Poor weak old man,
I am most sorry for you. This it is!
Now I shall go. Farewell. Farewell, my friend!
You are a sorry alchemist, old man!
Yet, out of pity, if the poison be
The very same I seek, my men shall bring
The promised gold here to your door to-night.
Farewell!
[*He goes out chuckling. The Alchemist looks after him, then goes to the table and sits down.*
ALCHEMIST. What is it I have done! Alas,
Why did I let him take it? It is true,
I am a weak old man, too full of plans
Wise in the making — but the working out —
There is no working out of any plan;
Everything fails — life fails. . . . And yet I know
The poison will not fail of dark success;
And if the Duke pay well, I need not fear,
Though Lord Francesco leave me. . . . It is true
The Duke would find my poison in the end;
I could do nought but give it him at last. . . .
Now I shall rest . . . perhaps it is no sin
To wish for rest — for rest! . . . Felix, go home
And leave me. It is late. I wait alone.
FELIX. Master, I may not.
ALCHEMIST. Why?
FELIX. My mother said —

ALCHEMIST. What of your mother?

FELIX. I may not return
Save with my wage of silver in my hand.

ALCHEMIST. How can I pay you silver?

FELIX. We must eat —
We are so poor — and I have worked for long,
Hungry. She says that I may not return
Save with my wages.

ALCHEMIST. Yet how can I pay?
Truly I have no money —

FELIX. There's the chain,
The silver chain Francesco melted up.

ALCHEMIST. Go, take it. Pour it from the crucible.
(*Felix does so, cools it by pouring it into a bowl of water*)
This night I shall not make experiments.
And now Francesco cannot have his gold
When he returns — for the last test is over.

FELIX. I thank you, Master, and good night.

ALCHEMIST. Good night.

[*He goes about the room, touching this and that, blowing out the lamps, all but one on the table, and quenching the fire under the crucible. Finally he sits down and begins to study a chart on his table.*

VOICE OF FIRST SERVANT OF THE DUKE.
Open the door, old man!

[*Two servants push it open, and bring in a small box of gold pieces, which they hold between them, and do not yet put down. They look about curiously, as if half afraid.*

SECOND SERVANT. Look what a place
Of eerie shadows! See them on the wall —
And there — beyond the window! Let us go.

FIRST SERVANT. Nay, cross yourself. No harm can come to you.

[*They cross themselves.*

SECOND SERVANT. Men say he deals in blackest wizardry
And magic, and I warrant they speak true.

Look at that lot of devil's bric-a-brac
Where he breeds poisons!
[*They come nearer to the table.*

FIRST SERVANT. Peace. He sits so still
There by the table. (*Points*) Think you he's asleep,
Or working at a spell? He hears us not.

SECOND SERVANT. Then let us go, and leave the treasure here.

FIRST SERVANT. Fool! Art afraid to talk to him?

SECOND SERVANT. In truth
You know this is no place for righteous men.
Let us begone.

FIRST SERVANT. No, stay. I'll call to him.
Old man, listen to us. We bring good news.
(*The Alchemist raises his head*)
Here is much gold for you.

SECOND SERVANT. Aye, so there is —
Sent by the Duke, in generosity.

FIRST SERVANT. Yea, and for such slight work, he pays you well,
And bids us bring you thanks, and say 'twas good,
That poison that you sent. Francesco died
Soon as he tasted it. So said the Duke.
[*The Alchemist sinks back, horrified, and remains there, gazing straight ahead.*

SECOND SERVANT. Good news it is, old man. Therefore rejoice.
(*They lift the coffer to the table*)
See all this gold packed in the coffer here!
You shall live royally for years to come.

FIRST SERVANT. Perhaps you'll give us each a piece of it,
Since we have brought you fortune.

SECOND SERVANT. Come, old man,
Have you no word to say in gratitude?

ALCHEMIST (*moving his lips only, expressionless in a daze of horror*).
Aye, "None shall fail or taste of last despair

Save by the evil of his ways." And so
My hand that sought for gold finds not its gold —
This is the end. . . .

[*He slowly gropes for a handful of gold pieces, but does not look at them. His eyes still gaze forward in wide horror.*

SECOND SERVANT. What means he, think you, now?

FIRST SERVANT. Seems like an evil conscience.

SECOND SERVANT. True. The Duke
Said that he dared defy him for a time.
Is it your conscience troubles you, old man?

FIRST SERVANT. He's silent. . . . But we cannot wait so long.

SECOND SERVANT. Perhaps he's overcome with his good luck.
I'd be astonished at it, wouldn't you?

FIRST SERVANT. Aye, that I should. . . . Good night, old man!

SECOND SERVANT. Good night.

[*They go out, closing the street door after them. The curtain falls slowly.*

THE SILENT WAITER

VOTE THE NEW MOON

ALFRED KREYMBORG

Alfred Kreymborg, one of the pioneers in the new movement in poetry and drama, was born in New York City, December 10, 1883. He was educated in the local schools and, between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five, supported himself by teaching chess and giving exhibition games. In 1914, he organized the group of radical poets which called itself "Others." Several anthologies of poems and two volumes of plays are the fruit of this movement. Mr. Kreymborg's best known play is "Lima Beans." His two volumes of plays are "Puppet Plays" and "Plays for Merry Andrews." The two examples included in this collection are from the latter book.

THE SILENT WAITER

A TRAGI-COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By ALFRED KREYMBORG

TO GORDON CRAIG AND
HIS MARIONETTES

Characters

JIM
HAL
THE WAITER

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Applications for permission to produce "The Silent Waiter" should be addressed to Norman Lee Swartout, Summit, N. J. No performance may take place without his consent.

THE SILENT WAITER

One of the dimly lighted windows of a café seen from the street. The rest of the building, and of its environs, in darkness. At the rise of the curtain, the shade of the window is down. Behind it, a distinct murmur of voices:

FIRST. My head's really hot. I've been having too much.

SECOND. Tut, lad. It's not the wine, but this corner we're in. It's getting stuffy.

FIRST. I'll raise the shade —

SECOND. And betray our privacy? (*They laugh quietly*) Wait — don't you bother. Let the waiter do it. (*Louder*) — I say there — Waiter! Raise this shade, will you?

[*Pause. An unseen hand raises the shade. The window is oblong, with the long lines horizontal. It is composed of three panels. In the first and third, two young men are seated in profile. One can only see their heads, torsos and arms. Their chairs and table stand below the lower frame of the window. Most of the significant action which ensues, appertaining to the entrances, pantomime and exeunts of the men's hands, wine bottles, glasses, etc., unfolds in the lower half of the middle panel, and in the upper half, as regards the entrances and exits of the waiter. One cannot see his head; it is always higher than the upper frame of the window. The action is vivid, incisive, rhythmical, and symbolical of the given mood or speech. The three men are in conventional evening dress. Jim is framed by the left, Hal by the right panel. Jim is romantic and considerably younger than Hal in appearance, but older, slower, graver in intonation and gesture. His features haven't attained their ultimate outline;*

Hal's have. His have the air of an ascetic. The scene might be suggested thus:

	WAITER	
JIM	Action of hands, bottles, glasses, etc.	HAL

The waiter turns mechanically and slowly disappears.

JIM. That's better, Hal.

HAL. Rather hot these nights, eh?

JIM. No, it's the wine.

HAL. Maybe something else does it — something not to-night or the wine?

JIM. What do you mean now?

HAL. Give it up?

JIM. Yes, you're cryptic again.

HAL. To-morrow, you turtle!

JIM. Guilty.

[*He laughs sheepishly.*

HAL. Forgotten her so soon?

JIM. Not quite. But after we've talked nothing but Stella, Stella, ever since we came, and to-morrow, to-morrow —

HAL. What then?

JIM. Why — since they're the only two topics I can feel about, think about, talk about — and the two you like most to humor me in — well, it was only Christian of me to try a new one.

HAL. Why?

JIM. Don't play the innocent. To-morrow's my party, not yours.

HAL. It'll be mine — outside looking on!

[*He laughs jovially.*

JIM. Drop your eternal banter.

HAL. Why so serious? You've grown positively solemn.

JIM. It's the heat — the wine — to-morrow — hang it, I'm nervous — it's —

HAL. You!

JIM. Me?

HAL. It's not alone you — but every man the night before —

JIM. Don't degrade it. You needn't class us with common —

HAL. There, there!

JIM. Why shouldn't I be solemn?

HAL. It's your last night —

JIM. What do you mean now?

HAL. Touchy! You know tradition says that the night before a man marries he shall spend with the boys —

JIM. Hang tradition —

HAL. And that the boys in this instance — so we agreed — are concentrated in me? —

JIM. Drown tradition, I say —

HAL. So do I, lad. Fill them up again.

[*The bottle, held out by Hal, appears in the middle panel.*

JIM. Hold on, old man, I've had enough.

HAL. But this one's exceptional — iconoclastic — one gulp will do it? (*Jim's glass appears reluctantly, wavering a little. The bottle tilts to the horizontal, and then to the upside-down perpendicular*) Hello — empty! I say, Waiter — another quart —

JIM. No, Hal, no!

[*Bottle and glass exeunt.*

HAL. Make it a pint this time —

JIM. The last — it's getting late — and to-morrow —

HAL. Is near! A pint this time, Waiter. (*The waiter appears, bows almost imperceptibly, and disappears*) A slow old cuss that. And silent. Acts as though he'd lost his tongue.

JIM (*with sudden animation*). I say — Hal!

HAL. Yes?

JIM (*eagerly*). Am I — really — worthy of her?

HAL. What — again?

JIM. I can't help it. Do you really think I'll — make her happy — and keep her happy —

HAL. Repetition three hundred and sixty-six! —

JIM. I know, old man, but once for all —

HAL. Once for all, Jim, *that* isn't the question! Of course, you'll make her happy, keep her happy — but the real question is —

JIM. What?

[*To Jim's disgust, the waiter reappears, leaves the smaller bottle, bows as before, and disappears.*

HAL. Weird fellow that —

JIM. What *is* the question?

HAL. Fill them up first.

[*The bottle and Jim's glass reappear, the glass more unconscious, steadier, than before. Hal fills it; glass and bottle disappear. Soon Hal's filled glass appears — in a direct approach.*

JIM. The question?

HAL. Don't look so suspicious. And tradition comes first. Let's get rid of it.

JIM. I'd rather drink to her — as usual.

HAL. Certainly! You intuitive cuss! Stella — the enemy of tradition — let her sink it! Ready? (*Jim's glass reappears. The glasses clink*) To Stella.

[*They drink — first Jim, quickly and awkwardly, narrowly watched for a moment by Hal — and then Hal, deliberately.*

JIM. Now!

HAL. To business, eh?

JIM. Ugly word!

HAL. To work — is that better?

JIM. Much. Begin.

HAL (*cautiously*). Lad, I'm older than you.

JIM (*sullenly*). I've heard that before.

HAL I've been through more, suffered more — I know more. Head and heart have finally learned their respective functions. Don't eat each other periodically. Not about love.

JIM. Ha, now I know what made you a recluse —

HAL. Rats!

JIM. No, cats!

HAL. Shut up — where was I?

JIM. On the point of dubbing me an adolescent ass.

HAL. Don't be one now. I'm not talking down. But across the level of this table.

JIM. Why the preamble? It sounds prophetic.

HAL. Ordinarily, it'd be platitudinous, inflated commonplace. Now, it *is* prophetic.

JIM. Moralize, you monk —

HAL. Thanks. Now, the real question —

JIM. Ah, yes, the real —

HAL. Jim! Is it your turn to talk, or mine?

JIM. Sorry. Go on.

HAL. Are we or aren't we — friends?

JIM. We are — go on.

HAL. To you, the world — outside of her and me —

JIM. Is an abomination! Go on, will you?

[*Hal quickly finishes his wine. Jim is leisurely.*

HAL. The question isn't will *you* make and keep Stella happy, but will *she* make and keep you —?

JIM. What's that?

HAL. Don't flare up again — do you want me to stop?

JIM. Go on.

HAL. You think me a sacrilegious meddler —

JIM. I don't —

HAL. You do — and if you don't, you ought to. Well — it's just this sacred myopia — sacred regard — I won't say you have for Stella so much as men generally have for the woman of their eye — it's this I'm after — that I want to denude — that I want you to see as I do — because it's the most insidious sentimentality, most vicarious poison in the whole human system. It's deadly.

JIM. I won't deny it. I wouldn't know how. But Stella —

HAL. I'm not saying you have it for her —

JIM. I have — and you know it! Don't beat about — particularize!

HAL. Good! You're a man! Shake!

[*Hal's hand appears.*

JIM. You must have had doubts hitherto —

HAL. Twaddle! Come! It's not the lover or friend I'm after. (*Jim's hand appears. The hands clasp, and disappear*) Well, Mister Man —

JIM. Thanks — I was sick of the lad —

HAL. Just an affectionate diminutive not usual with us Americans —

JIM. Shut up and go on!

HAL. Well — you and I and the rest of us have got to get over the jejune phase of the love mania, and the sooner the better for biology! Now that we're particularizing — can you recall the nursery rhyme which — might be applied —

JIM. To Stella? Ye gods, haven't I said it to her, *ad nauseam?* Twinkle, twinkle, little star —

HAL. How I wonder what you are —

JIM. Up above the world so high —

HAL. Like a diamond in the —

JIM. Enough — cut it — it's absurd!

HAL. Not at all. It's profoundly, fundamentally serious, tragic — whether a Roman say it — *Mica, mica, parva Stella* — or —

JIM. Cut the Latin — I've made her suffer that, too!

HAL. She doesn't suffer — on the contrary —

JIM. Never mind — go on!

HAL. You understand, it's this self-prostration I'm after? It's not Stella. I've only the highest regard —

JIM. Hypocrite! There you go yourself! One'd never suspect your regard from your visits. You haven't been to see her alone — without me — well, since you introduced me there — bless you!

HAL. That's another question — quite foreign. You know I never go anywhere — work nights — prefer my studies — my candle. And besides, she's been your preserve, as they say, from that moment to this!

JIM. What do you mean now?

HAL. I don't have to explain. Now, love — love isn't self-annihilation — nor is it altruism —

JIM. You must have loved a bit in your day to talk so fluently now —

HAL. This isn't my day, it's yours —

JIM (*sighs*). To-morrow —

HAL. And I'd rather talk fluently than suffer —

JIM. Cynic! So would I. Which one taught you how?

HAL. We'll reserve that roast for another meal —

JIM. That sounds bitter —

HAL. Not at all — it's matter of fact —

JIM. Who was she?

HAL. Are we discussing me or you?

JIM. Me — but —

HAL. Then be quiet. Besides, to-morrow? —

JIM. Is half an hour off —

HAL. As to the day — but the event?

JIM. Twenty and a half long, long hours —

HAL. A lightning calculator should see hours equal —

JIM. He doesn't — so hurry —

HAL. Half an hour longer?

JIM. Yes, yes!

HAL. Where was I?

JIM. Altruism.

HAL. Love isn't altruism — far from it. It'd be mighty poor stuff if it were — Nature'd stop it in a jiffy. The best of love — its real innerds — is strictly selfish.

JIM. Hal!

HAL. Isn't it?

JIM. Decidedly no!

HAL. If it isn't, you're not in love. Not with Stella, but with theories!

JIM. *You* are!

HAL. *You* are. We're like two dogs at a bone —

JIM. Sorry — go on.

HAL. Bring it down from the sky — out of the rarefied regions — diamonds don't grow up there. Poetry's as misleading as love — as sorely impregnated with sentiment, and as bewildering. Just why do you want to make and keep her happy?

JIM. Well —

HAL. For yourself, eh?

JIM. No — absolutely — I —

HAL. A man who stutters, lies!

JIM. Hal!

HAL. Jim? (*Pause*) Shall we go home?

JIM. No — go on.

[*Hal laughs gently.*

HAL. You admit the charge?

JIM. Don't rub it in.

HAL. Don't look so sour!

JIM. For God's sake, go on.

HAL. Not till you answer — and grin.

JIM. I admit it —

HAL. But you haven't grinned?

JIM. Damn you — there. (*Jim grimaces. Hal laughs freely*) Cut it.

HAL. Since the question isn't that you make Stella happy, but that she make you happy —

JIM. Oh!

HAL. You admit the former depends on the latter?

JIM. I suppose so.

HAL. That you can't make her happy unless you're happy yourself?

JIM. No.

HAL. That it takes her to make you happy?

JIM. Yes, yes, but —

HAL. And to *keep* her happy — as you add — she has to keep you happy —

JIM. Hal! How dare you presume —

[*He makes an effort to rise.*

HAL. Don't be heroic — sit down. (*Jim subsides*) Well? (*Jim doesn't answer*) You've thought about it, haven't you? Not a mere brutal premise on my part, is it? (*Jim shakes his head*) And you've not only wondered if she *can* keep you happy — but if she *will* — of her own volition.

JIM (*laboriously*). Why do you tell me this to-night?

HAL. I'm not telling it — I'm dragging it out of you — getting you to tell it — not to me, to yourself! (*Jim nods*) So you don't go to church on your knees, and deaf, dumb, and blind. I'm brutal because I love you, lad — know you —

JIM. Don't call me lad.

HAL. I'm brutal to Stella only by implication, and because —

JIM. You don't love her, know her —

HAL. Because I do!

JIM. What's that!

HAL. In you, man, in you!

JIM. Oh!

HAL. I can only speak of her side — generally —

JIM. From your experience with those who taught you to talk?

HAL. Don't be nasty. Resentment's out of place here.

JIM. Sorry — go on.

HAL. And don't be sorry. It puts *me* on a pedestal.

JIM. Go on.

HAL. From my experience — and my observation of others —

JIM. Rotten expression!

HAL. Yes — but we're not botanizing —

JIM. Biologizing!

HAL. From what I've felt and seen — is that better? —

JIM. Much!

HAL. Of the regard men have for women —

JIM. A rebuttal?

HAL. Yes.

JIM. Good Lord! That point's no longer in order. I've conceded it.

HAL. Granted. But losing that illusion — that ballast — we fall to earth with a bump and rebound back to the sky —

JIM. Good Lord!

HAL. Where we hear woman's version of the twinkle ditty sprawling to our stardom.

JIM. You don't know Stella.

HAL. I do.

JIM. See here, Hal! How well do you know her? This is the second time —

HAL. Never mind —

JIM. Don't say that! I'm not a baby!

HAL. You are when you prattle —

JIM. I'm not prattling. You knew her before I did, long before —

HAL. Not long before —

JIM. Before?

HAL (*evasively*). Well?

JIM. See here — how well did you know her? (*Reflectively*) Funny, I've never asked you that? Definitely? Nor her either! Hal!

HAL (*lightly*). Too blind — too dumb — trustful — not caring a fig about history after you won her — very early, wasn't it?

JIM. This isn't a mocking matter —

HAL. It is —

JIM. Glad to hear it. It's a relief, but —

HAL. And being trustful of me and the rest as soon as you were sure of her —

JIM. Will you stop?

HAL. Not till I've answered your: Funny, I've never asked you that.

JIM. Well, you've answered it. Sorry —

HAL. Glad, you mean —

JIM. Glad.

[*Pause.*

HAL. You see how much you want her for yourself?

JIM. We've been through that.

HAL. And how much your so-called wanting yourself for her is the same thing in the same glass?

JIM. Get back to the sky — this is uncomfortable —

HAL. That's why folk worship. It's easier.

JIM. I'm through with worship.

HAL. Even the semblance of it?

JIM. With the whole of it!

HAL. Good for you! You've graduated —

JIM. From ladism, eh?

HAL. No, from what folk call manhood!

JIM. Thank God!

HAL. Fill them up again!

JIM. Let's! (*Repetition of pantomime of bottle and glasses*) To manhood, deceased —

HAL. No, Jim — to you — reborn.

JIM. And you, Hal.

HAL. To us then —

JIM. Individually —

HAL. And together.

[*They laugh a little, drink, laugh a little.*

JIM. Now?

HAL. We're back in the sky — looking down on — adored by — the women who are foolish.

JIM. But not Stella?

HAL. Not Stella.

JIM. Well?

HAL. A final gulp first to the ladies in question —

JIM. By all means —

HAL. It's a long journey back —

JIM. With many circumlocutions!

HAL. To the ladies!

JIM. The ladies! (*They clink and finish their glasses. Hal looks abstracted*) Well?

HAL. Eh?

JIM. What are you waiting for?

[*Hal loses more and more of his nonchalance as he proceeds.*

HAL. How I wonder what you are!

JIM. Are you drunk?

HAL. No — reminiscing.

JIM. Oh, the nursery —

HAL. Invoking it as a text —

JIM. I thought we were through with that?

HAL. With the man's version —

JIM. And the woman's? —

HAL. The same, but the interpretation's different —

JIM. Different?

HAL. Quite a little — decidedly — vastly —

JIM. Stop fishing for words!

HAL. Eh?

JIM. You seem in difficulty — for the first time — befuddled — just as much as we —

HAL. Who?

JIM. Lovers.

HAL. How?

JIM. When women enter!

[*Hal makes an obvious effort at self-recovery.*

HAL. I'm considering them — want to spare them, be nice to them, gallant —

JIM. Sentimentalist yourself!

HAL. No, I'm poising my lance for the attack. These are mortal lists, and he who wins — man or woman — is the one with the intricate equipment —

JIM. Go to, Sir Walter!

HAL. Go to, yourself.

JIM. Well?

HAL (*nervously*). Hadn't we better have some more wine?

JIM. Your brain's addled already!

HAL. Woman champion! (*Jim bows ironically*) Now, don't interrupt. I have to feel my way here.

JIM. Why now and not before?

HAL. I have to be impersonal — prate in the plural —

JIM. Don't mind me — use the singular —

HAL. Want to probe my skeletons?

JIM. Whose else can you prate about? —

HAL (*suddenly*). You won't mind the revelation?

JIM. Not at all.

HAL (*evasive again*). You're safe against it?

JIM. Why not?

HAL. Glad to hear it. I'm not.

JIM. Where are you driving now?

HAL. That remains to be seen.

JIM. Confound your cryptomania.

HAL. Double-confound it.

JIM. Well?

[*They study each other for a moment. Hal breaks the suspense.*

HAL. Well — it's like this! Begins like a testament, eh?

JIM. Begin, begin —

HAL. With the world listening? —

JIM. Who cares about a waiter? —

HAL. Oh, is he there? —

JIM. In the next room — he can't hear. But Hal — can this be you? Are *you* afraid of opinion?

HAL. Only lest somebody think I'm spreading a treatise far more imposing than the facts deserve.

JIM. Lord, have mercy —

HAL. There's nothing so stupid to listen to in the whole curriculum of gossip as a man's sex reactions.

JIM. What circumnavigation! Will you ever come to port? I can't find you any more. Where are you?

HAL. Here.

JIM. Who'd know it? Considering it's you — our paragon among ascetics — without flaw hitherto? Have you of all men — a conscience?

HAL. An artistic one. I despise banality.

JIM. Art is its glorification!

HAL. Don't be epigrammatic.

JIM. Then save me from it! Will you ever begin?

[*Hal is nonplussed. Then quickly* —

HAL. Jim!

JIM. What's the matter?

HAL. I — can't —

JIM. Can't what?

HAL. Don't look at me — I simply can't — go on with this!

JIM. What can't you go on with?

HAL. This — generalizing. It's stifling —

JIM. Stifling? —

HAL. I've got to come to — the particular —

JIM. Woman?

HAL. Yes.

JIM. Why shouldn't you? — does it — hurt?

HAL. Damnably.

JIM. Hold it back —

HAL. Too late — I can't —

JIM. Wait — I'll call for more wine —

HAL. I don't want wine.

JIM. Then out with it — you can trust me — get rid of it — we've no secrets from each other —

HAL. That's just the trouble — we have!

JIM. Yes? (*No answer*) Hal! (*No answer*) Look at me — who is it? (*No answer*) Christ — it isn't —

HAL. It — is.

JIM. God help us —

[*Jim clutches out and collapses on to the table. One can barely see his head.*

HAL. Not us — Jim lad — you.

JIM (*faintly*). Me?

HAL. You. (*Jim slowly raises his head. His face is wild, haggard. Hal's is ashen — but he again seems master of himself*) It doesn't exist — now.

JIM. It's past? —

HAL. Past.

[*Jim straightens himself with the aid of the table.*

JIM. That isn't so terrible — if it's over — is it over? — is it —

HAL. Utterly —

JIM. For good?

HAL. Yes.

JIM. Then what's so terrible? — except that I didn't know before? — but that's not so terrible — (*he laughs huskily*) — is it? — that you never told me? But — Stella? —

HAL. That's it.

JIM. What?

HAL. Can't you see?

JIM. My head's going round —

HAL. Give it a rest — and I'll tell you. I can't — quite — with you looking at me —

JIM. You haven't gone back on me, too?

HAL. No — nor she — don't say too.

JIM. Is there anything — to be ashamed of? Hal!

HAL. Nothing.

JIM. What then?

HAL (*tenderly*). It's not hers or mine now — it's just yours — entirely.

JIM. Mine — now — entirely? What is?

HAL. The shock. (*A long pause. Jim seems gradually to shrink into himself. His head seeks his arm and the table*) That's right, try to rest, and I'll tell you. And remember, I'm with you — I'll help —

JIM (*faintly*). You will?

HAL. Yes. You're not — alone. (*Jim's shoulders move convulsively. But one cannot hear him sob. His hand gropes its way across to Hal's. Hal's other hand reaches out and strokes Jim's head. The convulsions cease*) Shall I tell you?

JIM. Yes.

HAL. I want to help you — not alone because I want to — but because I've got to.

JIM. What good — will that do?

HAL. Lots.

[*Pause.*

JIM. For God's sake — don't be silent — say something!

[*Hal strokes him further.*

HAL. Is that better?

JIM. It helps me to think — my head's whirling — that's better — never mind now — let's be men.

[*Hal smiles sadly and stops stroking Jim.*

HAL. May I hold —

JIM. Yes — a little longer — you'll have to — I can't let go yet.

HAL. We're together in this?

JIM. Individually — and —

HAL. Good — you remember the toast!

JIM. You're a brick —

HAL. Kind of hard, eh? —

JIM. And soft.

HAL. Bless you.

[*Pause.*

JIM. Go on now. I can stand it.

HAL. Sure?

JIM. Yes.

HAL (*quietly*). Not being a Christian — I'm not blaming anybody. Remember that, will you, all through?

JIM. Yes.

HAL. Stella — never belonged to me.

JIM. No?

HAL (*growing more and more pensive as he proceeds — Jim less and less attentive*). In the superficial acceptance of such phrases, one could say, she loved and belonged to me — but in reality, she never did. She belonged to herself, loved herself. That isn't peculiar. What I mean is — she loved what she thought me to be — craved that — and not finding me to be what she thought — loved what she insisted I must be — demanded it of me. I tried, of course, but couldn't keep it up. I'm not superhuman. To be what she wanted, I had to be more than myself — had to lie. Even lies have their limit. So I burst — dropped in her regard from what she thought and demanded down to what she could, in justice to either of us, no longer think or demand. I was thrown aside like a used glove.

JIM. Dear old Hal. She didn't understand you.

HAL. Love in such a case has nothing to do with understanding the other fellow. It has solely to do with self-understanding — with self-imagining and self-adventure the means — towards self-expression, the *ultima Thule.* One sets forth on such a quest expecting to find not only

what one sets forth to see, but anticipating thrilling encounters not bargained for. One can't return from such a quest. One must continue it to the death, or try a new one.

JIM (*dazed*). Is that where I — ?

HAL. We'll come to you later. At the start, I was as much the adventurer as she. I loved what I thought her.

JIM. Worship?

HAL. Self-prostration to star-exaltation — worship and deception — center and circumference.

JIM. Even you?

HAL. You don't recover from a disease till you've had it?

JIM. No.

HAL. In my case, however, when I didn't find her what I asked her to be —

JIM. Dear girl —

HAL. I somehow compromised — or thought I did — tried to — between that and what she actually was. I came as far around to her as it's possible for one being to come to another after an infection of worship. But even a recovery from such an infection leaves one exhausted, crippled. In her case, there could be no compromise, because her worship of me — her prostration — was directed — if anything so nebulous can be directed — to herself. She didn't crave the ideal man so much as she did some hypothetical creature which should supersede her, as suppliant, to herself, as star, so that she might be the latter, solely, freely, untrammeled. This required a supernatural agency on the part of the man of her choice. Somehow, I was able to be, I was elected — that choice — but try as I would, I couldn't fill out her portrait of the priest.

JIM. How quietly you tell it!

HAL. I can now — I couldn't have then. I was in the midst of elements then — an atom driven, whirled, knocked down, broken, pieced together, lifted again — with the whole round over for another series of concussions

experience could never brace me against. She was always the one clear image outside the tornado — always slightly reproachful — but otherwise somewhere aloof from it all — a thing on a stone — as still as the stone — a part of it — seemingly the stone herself — but for that almost imperceptible frown. At the last, she was a cool god who has no further concern with a disturbance after the act of pushing it away, like a meteor, with his finger tip. Even his frown vanishes.

JIM (*in awe*). Is — that — Stella?

HAL (*with oblivious rapture*). One had to admire such a mechanism even when one suffered most — the moment of the tiny impact — the moment before the crash of destruction. However, that's over. I haven't suffered since.

JIM. Quiet, you mean?

HAL. Quiet's a pretty good name for it.

JIM. So am I.

HAL. What do you mean?

JIM. I don't know. It's queer. Go on.

HAL. Have you been listening?

JIM. As closely as I could.

HAL. I see.

JIM. Don't mind me.

[*Jim withdraws his hand; Hal doesn't prevent him.*

HAL (*as before*). It was an everlasting round of give, give, on my part. And each thing given, soon tossed away with no more effort than a gesture, always beautiful to see. And always followed by that imperceptible sign of reproach — the great goad — the quick lightning — its tip, the obliterating bolt. The give, give — less and less a part of me, more and more an act inspired by what she held me up to, drove me on with, struck me down. And so, with my degrees of sheer exhaustion coming more and more frequently and uncontrollably — I was soon empty — after only a few weeks of such a pace — empty of what she held me up to. I retreated to my real self — as a rein-

forcement — no, not even to that, for my real self had fallen deformed, hunchbacked, spineless. It was no longer the original I'd brought her — no longer a force to depend on. I needed an army, not a cripple. And even had it been my old self — an army if ever there was one! — strong, glad, mountain-climbing defense-destroyer that it was! — she had received its service. Repetition would have revolted her.

JIM. Stella!

HAL. These were always the moments when she was truly oblivious, most pitiless. When the imperceptible flashed to the perceptible. A little giving on her part — the shadow of a compromise —

JIM. She never gave? —

HAL. No. A little giving in the form of a foolish caress — not necessarily felt by her — would have been the torch to revive me enough to make still one more effort to pursue her star-chase for her. But I wasn't an atom worth helping — not in her cosmos. From her view — up from the deeps of her — consciously or subconsciously — she was right.

JIM. Can you say that?

HAL. Yes, dispassionately.

JIM. What — am I — to say?

HAL (*unheeding*). I confess — I wasn't so pleasantly philosophical at the time. It wasn't flattering to my ego. To learn that I wasn't loved for myself — for what I had to give — for not even a particle of either — that was merely humiliating. But when I couldn't supply what she wanted — a self she demanded I be and give — self of her self — it was annihilating. It left me dazed, dumb, stupid, useless. Old Doctor Travel, himself, couldn't cure me. Cured me of the suffering, yes — but not of the stupor. Even nowadays, fully two years later — when I sit up there nights in my tower — the cell only you are permitted to visit — I begin wondering — I go over it all again — do it unawares — it catches me like a shadow —

comes in like a ghost and takes me — while I'm reading a book — pondering another man's thought — it comes between me and him — as though corporeal things didn't exist — only essences of things once corporeal — to which I'm recalled. The stupor deepens. The very room is enveloped by it — is gone. And I fancy that not even I — am sentient.

[*Hal's face has undergone the change he describes.*

JIM. Hal!

HAL. And I wonder — if I can — whether my conclusions are a result of so much cogitation — airy theorizing — or an outcome of the stupor out of which nothing concrete can ever come again — beyond further stupor and further speculation.

[*Jim sits up. His expression is one of terror.*

JIM. Hal — Hal!

[*Hal smiles.*

HAL. Well? I'm not afraid. I can go on with it.

JIM. You're not — you can — but what of me?

HAL (*sobering to the former situation*). You? Jim? Oh, yes—

JIM. You did — what I'm still doing —

HAL. Yes, lad.

JIM. Went through it — it's over with you — but with me? —

HAL. With you — Jim — it's —

[*He falters. Jim hides his face in his hands.*

JIM. Why did you — tell me — to-night?

HAL. Are you sorry?

JIM (*with a supreme effort*). No.

HAL. Resentful?

JIM. No.

HAL. What then?

JIM. I feel — so frightfully — alone — lost.

HAL. I'm here.

JIM. But you — can't take her place. Stella! Stella!

[*He once more seeks refuge in his arms.*

HAL (*gently*). Nobody can take her place. Not even you.

JIM. It's all so — desperate. To-morrow's — gone — and the next day — all days! Why — did you — tell me?

HAL. To save you, as it's called, and to —

JIM. You think this saves me? It may save me *against* — but what does it save me *for* — (*he sits up*) — What for, eh?

[*His tone is menacing.*

HAL. Yourself.

JIM. What am I to do with that? — what good is it now? — it's dead — it couldn't be any use to her — and being no use to her, what do I care about it? — it's nothing to me — it's worth throwing away, that's all — before it was ever used — like yours!

HAL. You know it was used. Richly, gloriously.

JIM. But not like yours — it never got so far. There *were* reproaches — there still are — but not like yours. You got silent ones — the kind a god would get — or even a man — I get actual ones — chiding — the kind a child would. I was used all right — richly and the rest — so I thought before you began. I've been to mountain peaks and sky places, but not like yours. She's never goaded me higher. I'm not worth goading higher. I'm a —

HAL. That was on the way, Jim. And you're not a child — neither was I — you were younger — that's all. You needed more suffering first — apprenticeship — further maturing — and then! —

JIM. Stella compromised! I'm her compromise!

HAL. Nothing of the sort. You're simply the new quest leading to the same old jungle. I've been seeing it right along — since I got back — in you yourself. Not at first — not for some time — but in our last few meetings — your growing uncertainty — your hidden cancer breaking out in moroseness — that haunted look you never had before — sprite that you were! I could see by its greater frequency just what she was thinking and doing — her motive and method — how high her thought of you flew — how much quicker and sharper the goad. (*Jim has sunk to a stupor*)

I could see the whole plot more and more clearly — saw it as I sat here — saw it beyond further need of seeing. Not so many weeks ago — the first gloom I encountered — the first sign of that look — that beginning of a paralysis as sure of its victim as death — proved it to me — more clearly than if she had proclaimed it herself: This is he — this the one — this henceforth mine! Are you listening?

JIM. Trying to.

HAL. Do you need a final proof?

JIM. Yes — for God's sake —

HAL. The so-called courtship was a long one? —

JIM. I don't have to tell *you* that —

HAL. But the engagement itself — the announcement — sudden?

JIM. You know that too —

HAL. And the wedding cards — close after — still more so?

JIM (*reviving*). Yes! Yes! (*With frantic joy*) — Hal! Is that it?

HAL. Yes. You were ordained at last. Your novitiate over — your priesthood begun.

JIM (*with clutching eagerness*). Was that how it happened —

HAL (*warily*). With me? Yes. But much earlier — almost the moment we met. But it didn't last long. I told you that. We never got to your — to-morrow.

JIM (*gloomy again*). There you are.

HAL. Where?

JIM (*hopelessly depressed*). Yours had a beginning — at once — and an ending. A life and death — a full eternity.

HAL. You envy me?

JIM. Yes!

HAL. Despite being able to see you'd have gone the way I did?

JIM. Even so — even more so! I might have gone further —

HAL. No, Jim. Don't try to deceive yourself there. You can't.

JIM. But think of what I've lost! Who cares about suffering? — what of that? — God give me that — rather than this!

HAL. It can't be —

JIM. Thanks to you! Of course it can't! Not with me — not very far! But did you have to stop me? Why did you bring me here? What devil made you pick on to-night?

HAL (*tenderly*). *Her* devil.

JIM (*dangerously*). Could *you* do such a thing? — do you hate her now? — was it revenge?

HAL (*bluntly*). Don't invoke the villain. Such words aren't in my line.

JIM. They are — in your smooth way — you may have other words for them — but they're the same — the motive behind them the same! Didn't you bring me here?

HAL. Yes.

JIM. Didn't you get me to drink? —

HAL. That's nothing new —

JIM. And then tell me all this — in a slow, sneaking way? Didn't you have trouble telling me? You didn't tell me at once?

HAL. Fire away.

JIM. You were hiding it — hiding something — you might have told me before — months ago — before you took me there —

HAL. Yes.

JIM. But you didn't? —

HAL. No.

JIM. You —

HAL. Stop!

[*Their glances meet. Hal's is the steadier. Jim looks away, grief-stricken.*

JIM. Sorry — Hal.

HAL. Don't. You had to have your storm. Had to hit somebody. I had mine — only worse.

[*Jim shakes his head.*

JIM. Storms are no use. Not now.

HAL. They are. (*Jim shakes his head again*) Now we can think.

JIM. What good's thinking? It hasn't done you any.

HAL. Not yet.

JIM. When will it?

HAL (*significantly*). Mighty soon.

JIM. When?

HAL. Thinking eventually leads to action —

JIM. When?

HAL. When men — do it. (*Jim looks quickly at Hal. And as quickly away*) You see?

JIM. Yes.

HAL. Am I wrong?

JIM. No. (*Hal thrusts two fingers into his vest pocket. Deliberately, he takes out a phial and holds it at attention. Jim spies it; Hal lowers it*) Christ! — What's that?

HAL. Action.

JIM. What — now?

HAL. Yes. (*With a groan, Jim gropes for the table*) You're not — afraid?

JIM (*brokenly*). No — but I hate — to go —

HAL. Alone?

JIM. Yes.

HAL. You'll not go — alone.

JIM. Hal! (*His hand leaps out. Hal catches and holds it. Their heads are close*) Then you still — love her?

HAL. Yes.

JIM. The — impossible?

HAL. Unattainable.

JIM. And without it?

HAL. There's nothing.

JIM. Like me?

HAL. Yes.

[*Pause. Jim leans back. So does Hal.*

JIM. Tell me.

HAL. Yes?

JIM. Why'd you not think of this — then? Why did you —

HAL. Wait? (*Jim nods*) It may sound heroic — fishy —

JIM. What?

HAL (*with intensive monotone*). That I did it for her.

JIM. This waiting?

HAL. Yes.

[*Jim stares at him, searches his face, gently withdraws his hand.*

JIM. Then — it — *is* — (*Hal smiles and shakes his head*) Why'd you wait so long — take me there first — and never go there yourself — without me — and even that only a little? And keep silence so long — let us two go so far — wait until the very last? —

HAL. I said — for her —

JIM. Yes, but in Christ's name — why?

HAL. That she — so to speak — might learn — have time to learn — that in losing me, dropping me — she was losing herself.

JIM. But why now — why not then?

HAL. She needed proof of the same order — a recrudescence of the search and discovery — that her love for a man is love of herself.

JIM. Me?

HAL. Yes.

JIM. Why me?

HAL. Because you're the only other thing I loved — the only other I could regard worthy the lesson she needs and deserves.

JIM. I was worthy of her?

HAL. Yes.

[*Jim smiles.*

JIM. Thanks.

HAL. You see?

JIM. I think so —

HAL. That losing us both — she'll learn —

JIM. What love is? —

HAL. Yes.

JIM. But suppose she doesn't — even after us — suppose it isn't in her?

HAL. I think it is. If it isn't — well, the gods have erred again.

JIM. I'm sure it's in her. But —

HAL. Yes?

JIM. The experience — oh, how I envy the man! — will go to —

HAL. One we needn't begrudge!

JIM. No?

HAL. Won't we be a part of their world?

JIM. The stars?

HAL. The earth.

JIM. I see. (*Hal smiles. So does Jim*) Let's order another bottle —

HAL. Pint? —

JIM. No, quart this time —

HAL. We won't need a quart? —

JIM. Only a sip! Trust you for that!

[*They laugh quietly.*

HAL. Well?

JIM. This one's on me!

HAL. Agreed.

JIM. I say there — Waiter — Waiter! Is the fellow gone deaf?

HAL. No — but he must be dumb. Here he comes.

[*The waiter reappears.*

JIM. Another pint, please.

[*The waiter turns away.*

HAL. One moment. Will you bring the bill with you? (*The waiter bows and goes*) He hears all and says nothing!

JIM. How do we settle?

HAL. That item's almost our last. We'll pay him right away —

JIM. Have you any other debts?

HAL. No — have you?

JIM. None.

HAL. Solvent, eh?

JIM. Trial balance! (*They laugh*) And our feudal estates? — bonds? — holdings? —

HAL. Such as they are?

[*They laugh.*

JIM. We haven't made our wills —

HAL. True — but let's not deprive our relatives, in the order of legal precedence, of the fun of hunting drawers —

JIM. Poor Aunt Emily — what a shock!

HAL. Nobody much to fight for my books — except rats.

JIM. Hal!

HAL. What's wrong now?

JIM. How about her? To think I could forget —

HAL. Don't flare up again. You haven't forgotten. In an experience like this — so utterly new — we're bound to bungle a bit —

JIM. But think of her, think of her — to-morrow — waiting! —

HAL. We won't be crude, melodramatic — though we do cheat society of a piquant *dénouement* — and the reporters —

JIM. Good Christ — stop!

HAL. Stop yourself. We've got to consider these last behests — with an eye to logic, not hysteria.

JIM. But what of her?

HAL. It'll be a crash, of course. But the more so the better. The sooner her self-love will shatter. And the sooner that happens —

JIM. Yes?

HAL. The sooner her new era will have its chance.

JIM. God help her to it quickly.

HAL. I'm with you.

[*Pause.*

JIM. But how to forestall to-morrow? How'll she understand?

HAL. We'll send her a line. She'll see.

JIM. Telegram? —

HAL. That'd be brutal.

JIM. How then?

HAL. We'll indite the line here and send it by messenger —

JIM. Can we get one here?

HAL. Yes. Why not our friend?

JIM. Which friend?

HAL. The waiter.

JIM. Are you crazy?

HAL. Why not? He's probably a night waiter — though I've never seen him before. He may be new here — he's so slow and awkward — he must be. If he's on duty nights, he's off during the day. Why not ask him?

JIM. If you're sure he can be trusted? —

HAL. It's a child's job. And we'll tip him handsomely. He'd go to Walla Walla for that, withered though he is.

JIM. Here he comes, slower than ever.

HAL. With his obsequious air. (*The waiter reappears — with the new bottle and the bill*) Set that down and give me the bill.

[*The waiter obeys. Hal reaches down into a trouser pocket.*

JIM. Hold on — this last bottle's mine.

HAL. That's at the bottom. One peso.

JIM. I'm getting off easy this time.

HAL. Your treat next inning. (*They laugh, and pay the waiter. He bows*) Here's something for your trouble. (*The waiter takes the tip, bows again and turns*) One moment. (*The waiter stops*) Are you a night waiter here? (*He bows*) You're off during the day? (*He bows*) In the morning? (*He bows*) Evidently you're not deaf? That won't hurt you any. Dumb though, eh? That's it then — well — you won't hurt anybody else much, will you? (*To Jim*) — Got a smile out of him that time — didn't I, Waiter? (*He bows*) Listen. We want you to do a very particular errand for us. Will you? (*He bows*) That's a good chap. We want you to take a letter for us — as early in the morning as you can — say, not later than noon — can you then? — (*He bows*) To a certain party — not very far from here. You're sure you can do it? (*He bows and holds out his hand*) It isn't ready yet. You'll have to come back for it. In ten minutes or so — at the end of this bottle — we'll call you. (*He bows*) We'll look after

you snugly. Does that intrigue you? (*He bows*) All right, sir. Don't forget. (*The waiter bows and goes*) Queer, eh?

JIM. Yes.

HAL. A most appropriate and satisfying agent.

JIM. You're queer yourself.

HAL. Why not? This is delicious. One might as well enjoy it while one has it?

JIM. To the dregs.

[*Hal laughs.*

HAL. We may not reach the dregs this time.

JIM. One little sip, eh?

HAL. One little one.

[*They laugh.*

JIM. Well?

HAL. You're ready? (*Jim nods*) The note first.

JIM. Oh, yes. What shall we say?

HAL. One line enough?

JIM. Three stark monosyllables!

HAL. Excellent!

JIM. What do we write on?

HAL. I've thought of that.

JIM. That too? Ye gods! (*Hal takes an envelope from his coat pocket and hands it to Jim*) Addressed! What a man! [*He removes the paper.*

HAL. That part's yours.

JIM. Thanks.

HAL. Got a pen?

JIM. No.

HAL. You'll never do! You're criminally careless! (*He pulls out a fountain pen and holds it out to Jim. Jim takes it, writes a little awkwardly, and then stops and studies the paper*) Have you signed it? (*Jim signs quickly and passes paper and pen to Hal. Hal signs with a careful hand. They lean over the paper*) Looks nice, eh?

JIM. Yours is firmer than mine — more practiced —

HAL. But yours is more — what shall I call it? — visionary?

JIM. Call it — blind. (*They lean back. Hal puts the letter into the envelope, which he seals and lays on the table with a banknote*) A ten-spot? That'll help him find the letter!

HAL. And now?

JIM. Fill them up — no, wait — let me do it this time.

HAL. Your hand steady?

JIM. Watch me. How much?

HAL. All the way as usual. (*They laugh. Hal holds out his glass. Jim's boast isn't vain, although he pours a little too much*) You've spilled some over —

JIM. Will that hurt now?

[*They laugh. Jim fills his own glass.*

HAL. Didn't pour too much that time!

JIM. No! Second trial!

HAL. What's that mean?

JIM. Nothing.

[*Jim holds out his glass to Hal's.*

HAL. You're in a hurry.

JIM. Why not?

HAL. The situation waxeth redundant?

JIM. *Ad nauseam.*

HAL. Mustn't spill that, eh?

JIM. No.

[*Hal opens the phial and pours several drops into Jim's glass, and then into his own. He raises his glass; so does Jim. Roguery flickers at mouth corners.*

HAL. Any toast?

JIM. Several.

HAL. Plural, eh?

JIM. Plural.

HAL. Better say them all in a row?

JIM. Much better.

HAL. Will you give them?

JIM. No, you.

HAL. Let's take turns.

JIM. All right — begin.

HAL. After you, Jim.

JIM. Thanks, Hal. (*Slowly, somewhat after the fashion of a ritual, but with exquisite cheerfulness, they take turns intoning and echoing toasts, between each of which their glasses caress, rather than clink*) To Stella —

HAL. To Stella — To — a twinkling star —

JIM. To a twinkling star — To — the whole sky —

HAL. To — the whole sky — To the earth —

JIM. To the earth — Twinkle — little glass —

HAL. Twinkle, little glass — To — her —

JIM. To — her —

[*Pause.*

HAL. Any more?

JIM. Yes, just one.

HAL. What is it?

JIM (*with an effort*). To — him.

HAL. Good for you, old man. To him! (*Pause*) Shake. (*They shake hands simply*) So long —

JIM. So long —

HAL. Better luck next time —

JIM. Same to you.

[*They let go, and smile — a little tremulously.*

HAL. Ready?

JIM. Yes — God bless you —

HAL. And you.

[*The glasses clink this time. Jim raises his quickly — Hal his slowly. Hal watches Jim. They nod to each other. Jim starts to drink, without hesitation. The glass topples from him. Jim falls forward. Hal nods — shakes his head — and then follows Jim. One cannot see them. A longer pause. The waiter appears as before — in the same slow, mechanical way. He bows — no, leans forward — and stretches his hand up to the shade. In so doing, he bends over, and his head comes into view for the first time. It is (if it isn't an hallucination) — a death's head. The head disappears as the shade is slowly drawn down over the window.*

CURTAIN

VOTE THE NEW MOON

A TOY PLAY

By ALFRED KREYMBORG

TO JOHN REED
AND LOUISE BRYANT

Characters

The Town Crier
Burgher
Burgess
Candidate Blue
Candidate Red
The Catfish

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Applications for permission to produce "Vote the New Moon" should be addressed to Norman Lee Swartout, Summit, N. J. No performance may take place without his consent.

VOTE THE NEW MOON

A TOY PLAY

The stage is dark and noiseless. Suddenly, a sound — like the sound of a stealthy step; suddenly, another — like the sound of a crier's bell; suddenly, a third — the sound of his singsong.

TOWN CRIER. Burgher and Burgess of this town —
dark has been dark entirely too long —
dark has been dark since the old moon fell —
a-flung to the river and a-gobbled by the Fish!
Burgher and Burgess — return from your snooze —
a moon helped us ever to see in the dark! —
snooze too long and you'll snooze your sight away! —
a burg is blind sans burgomaster!
You know I'm not an alliterative punster! —
the affairs of this realm are so close to my heart,
my heart's all a-riddle and a-riddle will remain,
till you wake this election and vote the new moon!
(*Light comes suddenly. Behold a town crier — who looks like a scarecrow, or a rag doll. The stage is bare — but, like a magic property man, he makes mathematic passes — and behold, in accordance with his next address, delivered with mysterious gusto, a sequence of building-blocks — beginning with a gate*)
You wouldn't be there, and I wouldn't be here —
if this were not a play, and it did not have a plot — so:
Here I stand at the gate to our town —
let me step inside and prove it such — so!
Presto, a house — a-painted blue —
belongs to our Burgher — you'll see him anon!
Presto, another — a-painted red —
belongs to our Burgess — you'll see him too!
Prestissimo, a third — a-painted like the first —
belongs to one candidate — Candidate Blue!

Prestissimo, a fourth — a-painted like the second —
belongs to his rival — Candidate Red!
The fifth house — summit! — with the belfry a-top —
that's the town hall where burgomasters dwell —
hark ye, it's been empty, since we slew the last —
look down the lane, and you'll see a purple strip —
the mystic little stream where we throw them when they're through —
ex-burgomasters and defeated candidates! —
wherein Red or Blue, this day, is gobbled by the Fish —
our longitudinous, latitudinous, altitudinous God —
half of Him Cat, half of Him Fish,
half of Him fur, half of Him scales,
half of Him earth, half of Him water —
half of Him life — the other half — death!!
This isn't moonlight — it's mornlight, or dawn! —
later, when the vote begins, the dark will return —
then — suddenly — as sudden as a sword —
what looks like a belfry will look like a moon —
red or blue the color — and the dark disappear!
Burgher, always for the blue, Burgess for the red —
woe, if they vote no moon — oblivion would come! . . .
Burgher and Burgess of this town —
dark has been dark everlastingly long —
wake — it's election day — vote your new moon!
One for the blue — oh — one for the red!
(*He raps on the Citizens' doors. After a pause, Burgher and Burgess pop out, like Jacks-in-the-box — the one in blue, the other in red. They look woefully thin and sleepy; their responses are categorical*)
Morrow — Burgher — what means this tardiness?

BURGHER. It means what it means —

CRIER. Morrow — Burgess — why this laggard air?

BURGESS. It means what it means —

CRIER. Dolts — do you know what day this is?

DUO. We — do —

CRIER. Oafs — aware how great it is?

DUO. We — are —
CRIER. Sensible of the need of it?
DUO. We — are —
CRIER. Would you feel the loss of it?
DUO. We — would —
CRIER. How would you feel the loss of it?
BURGHER. We wouldn't —
BURGESS. Be able to see —
CRIER. Would you like a loss like that?
DUO. We — would —
CRIER. You — would?
DUO. We — would —
CRIER. Louts — loons — blockheads — how dare you? — are you deaf? — deaf with sleep? — repeat!
Would you like a loss like that?
DUO. We — wouldn't —
CRIER. Again — louder!
DUO. We — wouldn't —
CRIER. Are you ready for the vote? — pinch yourselves!
DUO. We — are —
CRIER. Scratch your heads — kick yourselves!
DUO. We — are —
CRIER. Then where are your party flags? — flown? — eh?
DUO. Oh!
CRIER. Oh!
(*Two pennants — a blue and a red — wriggle up the Citizens' flagpoles, flutter at the tops*)
Where are your party hammers? — eh? — oh?
DUO. Oh!
CRIER. Oh!
(*Hammers, harmless as to size, appear in each right hand*)
Will you vote as always?
DUO. We — will —
CRIER. You, Burgher, vote for Blue?
BURGHER. I — will — glory to the moon!
CRIER. You, Burgess, vote for Red?
BURGESS. I — will — glory to the moon!

CRIER. Citizens — lift the hammer! Higher! —
still higher! — don't smite yet! — attention!
(*They had begun to rap each other, automatically, on the head*)
First let me hear your lilts —
years are years — and old as you are —
age as sleepy and stupid as yours —
habit, itself, forgets itself — now!
BURGHER. One for the blue —
BURGESS. One for the red —
CRIER. Good!
BURGHER. One for the blue —
BURGESS. One for the red —
CRIER. That will do —
BURGHER. One for the blue —
BURGESS. One for the —
CRIER. That — will — do!
Now — face each other — are you ready?
DUO. We — are —
ready for the moon —
CRIER. Citizens — beware — vote honestly!
(*They rap and vote — "one for the blue, one for the red" — but as they proceed, their strokes and voices grow feebler. Meantime, the Crier, nodding to the drowsy tempo, has brought his attention back to the audience*)
One for the blue — one for the red — you hear,
good folk — we shall soon see our moon —
you see — special interest is felt in this hour —
in that we've had up to the present hour —
one for the blue — one for the red —
we've had up to the present era of our realm,
seventy-two blue moons and seventy-two red! —
so that particular interest invades this partiular election —
one for the blue — one for the red —
insofar as it will determine definitely and irrevocably —
not alone who shall be our new burgomaster —
but which shall be our seventy-third! —
which definite and irrevocable decision is elicited,

you see — by the simplest, the most naive process in history —
of — one for the blue — one for the red —
of citizen smiting citizen on the head —
until one or the other falls insensible —
[*Accidentally, drowsily, somehow or other, the Citizens reverse their votes*

BURGHER. One for the red —

BURGESS. One for the blue —

CRIER. What's that? — am I too falling asleep? —

BURGHER. One for the red —

CRIER. In consequence of this indigenous phenomenon — to which Solon himself would have bent homage —

BURGESS. One for the blue —

CRIER. Am I dreaming? — excuse me while I listen!
[*The citizens are no longer drowsy; they have stopped hammering; their voices, under the strange influence of the transposition of motives, have grown impudent.*

BURGHER. One for the red —

BURGESS. One for the blue —

CRIER. Bones of dead moonbeams —
what treachery is this?
(*The citizens stop lilting and face front — the hammers fall to the ground*)
Blood of the sacred stream —
what regicide is this?
Burgher — what do you mean by, one for the red —
Burgess — you, by one for the blue?

BURGHER. I mean —

BURGESS. I mean —

CRIER. What do you mean?

BURGHER. We mean —

BURGESS. We're tired —

CRIER. Tired?

BURGHER. Of old moons —

BURGESS. We want —

CRIER. You want? —

DUO A new moon!
CRIER. Clowns — you'll have a new moon?
DUO. We'll not!
CRIER. Aren't you voting for one?
DUO. We're not!
CRIER. This is perplexing — amazing — dumfounding!
Dotards — what then are you voting for?
DUO. The same old moon —
BURGHER. A blue moon —
BURGESS. Or a red —
CRIER. You two are in league —
you want a change? — ha!
Burgher — you want a red now —
Burgess — you a blue?
How would that be a change?
DUO. It wouldn't —
CRIER. Then you don't want a change? —
Imbeciles — what do you want? —
DUO. A change!
CRIER. Ha — numbskulls — idiots — dissemblers —
elucidate yourselves — your do and don't —
spit it out — or I'll march you down the lane —
into the river — into the Fish!
DUO. Br!
CRIER. Ha — begin!
[*Hiding behind each other in turn and nudging each other with secret encouragement — they speak — with an obviousness bordering on mystery, an innocence on roguery.*
BURGHER. Cheese, though it melt, will always be cheese —
BURGESS. Milk left standing too long always turns sour —
BURGHER. A dog with four legs always runs on four legs —
BURGESS. An arm is always as long as it reaches —
CRIER. This is cataclysmic — what does it mean?
DUO. It means what it means —
BURGHER. If hair falls out, a head grows bald —
BURGESS. A knife cuts bread, it doesn't cut water —
CRIER. Ah — I begin to see — you're tired?

DUO. We're tired —
CRIER. Tired of the old ways? —
DUO. Old way —
CRIER. Old moons? —
DUO. Old moon —
CRIER. Laws, customs, routine? —
DUO. Old everything!
CRIER. I perceive your abracadabra —
DUO. You — do?
CRIER. Hm!
DUO. Hm?
CRIER. Hm!

[*The crier needs more than a moment's reflection — shakes his head. Suddenly, he flaps his sides like a rooster, and then raps at the doors of the Candidates. After a pause, they issue forth, dressed respectively in blue and red. Although they also look like Jacks-in-the-box, they have apparently more dignity than the Citizens, but like them, they appear woefully thin and sleepy.*

BLUE. Which of us — wins?
RED. Which of us — dies?
CRIER. Neither!
DUO. Neither?
CRIER. The vote was interrupted —
BLUE. Then why — are we called?
RED. An astonishing — precedent surely —
BLUE. Never heard of before —
RED. Nor written either —
BLUE. It's not — in the charter —
RED. The laws — statutes — decrees —
CRIER. Silence — debate comes later —
attention first to the rigmarole!
BLUE. The — rigmarole?
RED. On — election day?
BLUE. Never heard of before —
RED. Nor written either —
DUO. It's illegal!

CRIER. Silence — heed the official oath —
strike your traditional poses and paces,
as if it weren't election — now!
(*The Candidates adhere to the methodical postures and movements required by the rigmarole*)
Make of your lips
a hard straight line;
parallel with them your eyes;
make of your cheeks and chin
two strict right angles,
and of your ears and nose
two more;
have the part in your hair
diameter your head,
forehead, nose, lips and chin;
stick your arms
to your thorax and thighs.
Have your legs move,
since move they must,
in imperceptible perpendiculars,
like hidden two-four pendulums.
And some day,
so dignified a structure
will be hailed,
Burgomaster!

BLUE. Now then!

RED. Let us crawl back to bed!

CRIER. Sirrahs!

RED. I'm so sleepy —

BLUE. So am I —

RED. No hour to call a candidate —

BLUE. It's too early — not yet dark —

CRIER. Precisely!

DUO. Precisely?

CRIER. Cease your prate — while I disclose —
this most stupendous — most stupefying —
this super-superlative phenomenon!

DUO. Eh?
CRIER. Eye those two culprits — do you know them?
DUO. We — do!
CRIER. Do you recall haranguing them?
BLUE. Many a time —
RED. And often!
CRIER. What has been ever and always
the cause for your haranguing them?
DUO. The — vote!
CRIER. Which vote?
DUO. The vote for me!
CRIER. Now, politic sirs —
do you admit the following items?
Dark is dark without a moon?
DUO. We — do!
CRIER. A burg is blind sans burgomaster?
DUO. We — do!
CRIER. What elects the burgomaster?
DUO. The — vote!
CRIER. Who select the vote?
DUO. The — voters!
CRIER. And who and what elect the moon?
DUO. I — do —
by vote of the voters!
CRIER. How do you attain this dignity?
BLUE. Through numerical superiority —
RED. And the smiting insensible!
CRIER. Gaze upon yon twain!
(*They do so — with a heightening consciousness of the situation*)
Have you gazed?
DUO. We — have!
CRIER. Do you begin to discover the prodigy?
DUO. We — don't!
CRIER. Dolts — gaze again — steadfastly —
do you recognize yon twain?
DUO. Most adorable constituent —

BLUE. Burgher mine —
RED. Burgess mine —
CRIER. No longer yours!
DUO. Eh?
CRIER. Candidate Blue —
do you see Burgess insensible?
BLUE. Alas — I do not!
CRIER. What does that mean?
BLUE. It means — I lose — I die —
CRIER. It does not!
BLUE. Eh?
CRIER. Candidate Red —
do you see Burgher insensible?
RED. I do not — ah, me!
CRIER. What does that mean?
RED. It means — I lose — I die —
CRIER. It does not!
RED. Eh?
CRIER. Addle-pates —
it means — they haven't voted —
BLUE. To be sure —
RED. It's too early —
BLUE. Not yet dark —
CRIER. It means — they have refused to vote —
DUO. Refused?
CRIER. Burgher refuses to vote for Blue —
BLUE. Burgher!
CRIER. Burgess refuses to vote for Red —
RED. Burgess!
CRIER. Contrariwise —
Burgher refuses to turn to Red —
RED. Burgher!
CRIER. Burgess refuses to turn to Blue —
BLUE. Burgess!
CRIER. Do I speak truth — demogrades?
CITIZENS. You do!
BLUE. Amazing —

RED. Dumfounding —
CRIER. That's what I said — now —
it means furthermore —
DUO. Furthermore?
CRIER. That ye twain are to blame —
DUO. We — are?
CRIER. Your haranguing's to blame — was —
it was non-sufficient — non-alluring —
non-sufficient to sway the hearts of two dolts —
non-alluring towards the votes of two dolts —
dolts can't move dolts!
DUO. Eh?
CRIER. Citizens — do I speak further truth?
DUO. You do!
BLUE. My haranguing —
RED. My eloquence —
BLUE. My silvery phraseology —
RED. My golden rhodomontade —
BLUE. Inspirational of ages past —
RED. Polished, beautified, perfected —
BLUE. Non-sufficient?
RED. Non-alluring?
CRIER. Precisely!
DUO. What does it signify?
CRIER. It signifies — and grievous the signification —
you'll have to harangue all over again!
QUARTETTE. Bones of dead moonbeams!
CRIER. Would you have dark remain dark?
QUARTETTE. Br!
CRIER. Would you have oblivion come?
QUARTETTE. Br!!
CRIER. Would you have the sacred stream —
and the sacred purple Catfish —
QUARTETTE. Br!!!
CRIER. You begin to look like eels —
nocturnal, toothsome eels?
Shall the Catfish gobble you?

QUARTETTE. Br!!!

CRIER. Gaze upon the belfry —
it is empty, is it not?
Citizens — do you want to see a new moon? —
even a dainty sliver of a moon?

DUO. We do!

CRIER. Candidates — do you, too, want to see —

DUO. We do!

CRIER. All ensemble — do you want to see —

QUARTETTE. We do!!

CRIER. How will you — and when?

CANDIDATES. By haranguing —

CITIZENS. By voting!

CRIER. Paladins of this, our realm — gird your tongues —
retainers of this, our realm — your ears!
Do you gird?

QUARTETTE. We do!!

CRIER. Speak — great spellbinders!

[*Wearily, the Candidates make the effort of speaking. Warily, the Citizens, the effort of listening, the Crier furtively watching the latter.*

BLUE. I come to you to-day —

RED. I come to you this day —

BLUE. With a profound appeal to your discrimination —

RED. With the lofty purpose of lifting your thoughts on high —

BLUE. With the special intention of nobly catechising you —

RED. Toward the duties and pleasures of the honored —

BLUE. In the duties and joys of those conferring honor —

RED. I who come to you this day —

BLUE. On me who come to you to-day —

DUO. In behalf of the new-moon-to-be —

RED. The red moon —

BLUE. The blue moon!

[*They glare at each other momentarily, like skinny dogs closing over the same old bone.*

BURGHER (*sotto voce*). It's they who are in league!

BURGESS (*ditto*). They who conspire!
BURGHER. Each speaks like t'other —
BURGESS. Each mouths like t'other —
CRIER. Silence — babblers!
CANDIDATES. Eh?
CRIER. Not ye — continue — majestic your orations!
BLUE. It is difficult —
RED. Very difficult —
BLUE. I've always spoken alone — to Burgher alone —
RED. I alone to Burgess alone!
This is sorely non-customary —
BLUE. Non-conformative —
RED. Unwritten —
BLUE. Unspoken —
CRIER. Ye are noble as swans —
sailing down-stream —
sailing to victory — sailing to death —
RED. I don't mind dying —
BLUE. I've done it before —
RED. I mind not sleeping —
BLUE. Not finishing sleeping —
BURGHER. Fraudulent —
BURGESS. Frauds —
CRIER. Silence — rabble!
CANDIDATES. Eh?
CRIER. Not ye — continue — inflate your perorations!
RED. I need hardly testify —
BLUE. Quite superfluous the occasion —
RED. That the moon I glorify —
BLUE. Of celebrating the personality —
RED. That all-seeing crimson semicircle —
BLUE. Of the all-cleaving azure scimitar —
RED. Infesting all-dark with all-light —
BLUE. Hewing, slashing all-black with all-white —
RED. Incontestably bringing day to your night —
BLUE. Bedecking your heads with splinters so bright —
BURGHER. You hear? —

BURGESS. How they rhyme? —
CANDIDATES. And making manifest to you —
[*They stop and glower at each other — try to glower.*
RED. The potency of rouge — impotence of bluish —
BLUE. Eh, of sapphire, turquoise, lapis lazuli? —
impotence of pinkish! —
RED. Eh, of scarlet, carbuncle, flush of the rose? —
BLUE. Flush of the tomato! —
RED. Red which brings blushes to women —
love and desire to men? —
BLUE. Blue which kindles the eyes of women —
kindles the veins of men? —
RED. Blue which you taste in milk, half water? —
BURGHER. Milk left standing too long turns to water —
BLUE. Burgher! I'm aghast!
BURGESS. Red sunsets are made of dead dawns —
RED. Burgess! I'm smitten!
CANDIDATES. What does this mean?
CRIER. Louder, mutes — harangue them — silence them —
deafen them — deaden them! —
CANDIDATES. Damn them!
CITIZENS. Damn *them!*
CANDIDATES. Damn them to the moon —
CITIZENS. Damn *them* to the moon —
CANDIDATES. Damn them to the river —
CITIZENS. Damn them to the Catfish —
CANDIDATES. Oh, damn the Catfish! —
CRIER. Mutiny — insurrection — revolution —
homicide — fratricide — patricide! —
sacred purple Cat — sacred purple Fish —
pardon — mercy — mercy — pardon! —
QUARTETTE. Damn the Catfish!!
CRIER. Sacrilege!!
[*Immediately — from the river — there comes an ominous crescendo — swish — swish — flop.*
QUARTETTE. What was that?
CRIER. Save yourselves —

harangue — vote — vote — harangue —
or vengeance will fall! —
vote — harangue — harangue — vote —
death and perdition —
voices — lungs — bellows — roar!
(*Darkness shrouds the scene. A weird violet light creeps from the river — rises gradually — like a specter*)
The light — the fumes —
the dead are rising —
moons — burgomasters — people —
the blue — the red — all purple!

RED. V-vote for the blue moon —
I m-mean for the red —

BLUE. V-vote for the red moon —
I m-mean for the blue —

CRIER. Blunderers!

BURGHER. One for the purple —

BURGESS. One for the purple —

BURGHER. One for the purple —

BURGESS. One for the purple —

CRIER. Blasphemers! —
an evil spirit's got you! —
Fish — mercy — pardon —

CANDIDATES. V-vote for the Fish! —

CITIZENS. One for the purple —
One for the purple —
[*The sound of hammer blows grows louder, more rapid — din — clatter — groans.*

CRIER. Burgher — Burgess —
smite each *other!* — not them! —
each other! — can't you see?

BURGHER. Die, dog! —

CRIER. Burgher —
you've killed him —
your man — your moon —

BURGHER. And I'll gobble him! —

BURGESS. Die, dog! —

CRIER. Burgess —
you've killed him —
your man — your moon —
BURGESS. I'll devour him!
CRIER. I hear crunching of bones! —
help — murder — cannibals — ghouls! —
Burgher's swallowed Blue — Burgess, Red!
now they're eating each other!! —
BURGHER. Crunch for the purple —
BURGESS. Crunch for the purple —
CRIER. Speak — Burgher — Burgess —
which is it?
which swallowed which? —
CATFISH (*in sepulchral tones*). The — Fish!!
I — swallowed — them all!!
CRIER. Monster! — demon! —
save me! — spare me!!
CATFISH. I'll spare you!
My belly's full!
[*The violet has deepened to purple. One can now see a huge, misshapen figure — four times the girth of Candidates and Citizens — a complete purple resemblance — with appendages of whiskers, fins and tail.*
CRIER. My Master — King —
CATFISH. Your — Fate!
Down — dog!
[*The Crier falls on all fours — so does the Catfish.*
CATFISH. To the town hall!
CRIER. To the — town — hall!
(*He crawls to the entrance of the town hall. The Catfish follows pompously. The Crier throws open the door — announces*)
The new B-burgomaster!
(*The Catfish enters. Instantaneously, a moon appears in the belfry — purple. The Crier sees it and rises*)
The new M-moon!
Purple!

Color of kingship!
Woe!!
(*A frightful hubbub inside the hall*)
What does it mean? —
what — is it — now?
(*He disappears — the hubbub ceases. Suddenly, the ghostly, terror-stricken face of the Crier appears in the belfry — like a Jack-in-the-box moon-face profile, he pulls the invisible rope, and the bell tolls — more like a dirge than a pœan — he tries to singsong categorically*)
H-hark ye — h-hear ye —
the old moon is d-dead —
l-long live — the n-new!!

CURTAIN.

THE STICK-UP

PIERRE LOVING

Pierre Loving is a poet and critic who was born in New York, September 5, 1893. He has lived in various parts of the United States, chiefly making his home in Connecticut. He was educated at New York and Columbia universities. Mr. Loving has traveled extensively and lectured before working groups and college students. At present, besides conducting a regular department on the New York theatres for *The Drama*, he is a frequent contributor, in both critical and creative fields, to a number of well-known magazines. He is the translator of Arthur Schnitzler's "Comedies of Words" and co-editor of "Fifty Contemporary One-Act Plays."

THE STICK-UP

A ROUGH-NECK FANTASY

By PIERRE LOVING

Characters

COWCATCHER
PETE
KID
} Train Robbers

TIME: Eternity
PLACE: Inside the Orbit of Uranos

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THE STICK-UP

The atmosphere is pervaded by fold on fold of mist-blue shadow. Blinking lights flash out now and again. There is a sense of wandering distance.

Cowcatcher, Pete, and Kid emerge, half staggering, half lurching, out of the cloudy background, rubbing their eyes and clutching at space with the desperation of drowning men.

Cowcatcher is tall, hulking, loose-limbed, with the broad brow and aquiline face of one who is much given to dreaming, on occasions to commanding. Pete is short and stocky, and marvelously swift in his movements; his eyes are quick and restless and his hands seem always to be straying to touch something. Kid is thin, nervous, and ascetic in appearance. He is about twenty-three and by no means as small as his sobriquet would indicate, although he is not so tall as Cowcatcher. Cowcatcher nad Pete wear riding boots, breeches, and woolen shirts. Kid wears wrap leggings, tweed breeches, and a black shirt; the latter is obviously a part of a clerical make-up.

KID (*stumbling forward*).

Oh. — Oh. — I'm choking. Mercy, mercy, Lord!
It's like a hand made out of hemp gripped
Hard about my throat.
[*He coughs.*

PETE (*to Cowcatcher*).

Is that you, pardner? That you, Cowcatcher?
I dreamed I heerd your voice, Cowcatcher.
We've swum clean out of it, I guess.
At last! It had long fingers, cool and long,
That nightmare had, like — curled wet smoke
Only more thick.

COWCATCHER (*dazed*). Pete, where are you?

PETE. Here I am — here, old side-kick,

And here's Kid too, all slick and sound,
With mighty little of religion left
In him, I'll bet.

COWCATCHER. Is this . . . ?

PETE. Hell?

KID (*cringing*). Lord, Lord, have mercy on us! (*Kneeling*)
I cried by reason of mine affliction
Unto the Lord, and he heard me;
Out of the belly of Hell cried I,
And thou heardest my voice. . . .

PETE. My Gawd! He's got religion yet.
It ain't enough he crammed his nut
Full of that oily doctrine all his life
To be a preacher, but he must harangue
In this here place, and after all
Wot's happened down below . . . .
We ain't put in at Heaven or Hell,
Not yet. But look at them clean stars!

KID. Pete, where are we? Cowcatcher?

COWCATCHER (*with a drawl*). I dunno as yet. It's queer.
We're near the linin' side of worlds, I reckon.
Put out your hand. (*Kid obeys*)
Feel anything?

KID. No, why?

COWCATCHER. There ain't no weather here, that's plain:
No sun nor moon, no rain nor dew
No freshness of mornin' air.

PETE (*putting his hand out incredulously*).
Wot's that? No weather here!
How kin that be?

COWCATCHER. There just ain't. Make the best of it.

PETE. There's got to be some weather, pardner,
Warm, cold, rain, snow, shine, or something . . .
Well, wot about this fog?

COWCATCHER. It's here all right, but kin you see it?
It's always fingerin' your gorge
But where, in Christ's name, is it?

PETE (*philosophically*).
There's space to budge in, ain't there now?
Well, if there's space to budge in, why,
Things has to happen — weather has to happen.
COWCATCHER. Rot! Wot I want to find out bad
Is wot we're doing here and how.
KID. How'd we get here, Cowcatcher?
When are we going home?
PETE (*laughs*). Home? Ha! Ha! Ha!
[*His laughter is cut short by a swift-flying object sweeping past them.*
KID (*terror-stricken*). Lord, have pity! [*Kneeling.*
PETE. Christ, wot a wopper!
KID (*almost absentmindedly*).
And the angel sounded and there fell
A great star from Heaven burning. . . .
COWCATCHER. A flyin' star.
KID. Oh, I'm afraid. . . .
PETE. Slick Bible-monger! Wot's he bawlin' at?
He used to be gol-durned chipper once
When he would turn his learnin' to a stick-up
Or a can-openin' in a bank. (*Kicking Kid*)
Wot's up, anyhow?
The snifflin' sky pilot's blue-scared
Of bunkin' into God by chance
While steerin' straight for Hell.
KID. No! No! Not Hell!
Show us thy mercy, Lord. (*Sobs*)
If you believe in gentle Jesus. . . .
PETE. Too late!
KID. Pete, I don't want to die.
PETE (*irionically*). No?
KID. God. . . .
PETE. You think that you are God's
Own little brother, but you're not.
KID. He'll save me yet.
PETE. From wot — to wot? [*Pause.*

COWCATCHER. Where's your sand, your nerve?
Wot's happened, anyhow?
You don't have to nag your brain to remember.
You was once the finest stick-up 'prentice
In six or seven States.
Your Bible dope was mighty in your favor
And when you wanted to, you could look
As innercent
As any new-sheared lamb.
Now don't you go and lose
Your nerve, see, for our nerve
Is all we got in this here game
Of lootin' trains
Or blowin' boxes.

PETE (*to Kid*). You're scared, maybe,
That you're dead.

KID. Dead?

COWCATCHER. It might as well come out
Right now as later: you are dead.

KID (*sobbing*). No. No. The Lord will save me yet.
It's in his sacred Word, I tell you.
It says: I will redeem
Them from the power of the grave.
O Death, I will be thy plague;
O Grave, I will be thy destruction!

PETE (*troubled*). Are we dead, pardner, honest?

KID. How do you know we're dead?
No one can die
And afterward tell of it.

COWCATCHER. I ain't quite sure about you two.
You sort o' puzzle me.
You bicker like corn stocks in the wind;
Your minds are sort o' crazed and gropin'.
But I'm dead, Pete. I know.
I know because I ain't afraid
Of death no more.

PETE (*spitting*). Your brain is scrambled or —

I dunno — somethin' worse.
Suppose we ain't afeered o' Death
Would that make us any more alive?

COWCATCHER. Are you afeered, Pete?

PETE (*visibly shivering*).
Who? Me? Bah! You knows me, Cowcatcher.

KID. How did we die, Cowcatcher?

PETE. Maybe you — you're alive, Kiddo,
Because you ain't got guts enough
To own up that we're dead.

COWCATCHER. I remember how we died.

PETE. You do! Well, how? [*Pause.*

KID. If you know, for God's sake, tell us.

COWCATCHER. Yes, I remember how it was.
We was a-stickin' up
A well-heeled train that raced
Across great yellow miles of corn
And wheatfields.
I engineered most everything
As I always done.
Long before you two come in with me
I wanted one big job —
The job that comes but once in a man's life.
The chance that I had figgered on
Came with this here train.
One hundred thousand sweet simoleons in gold
Was aboard her. It was man-sized game,
The biggest game till then.

PETE. I think I remember now.

COWCATCHER. If we'd have got away with all that swag —
But wot's the use? We didn't.

PETE. Suppose we hadda got away with it?

COWCATCHER. It's this way, Pete.
If we had blown with all that swag,
(*Sighs*) — Oh, I was homesick for a farm,
I wanted to retire.

PETE. Retire?

COWCATCHER. Yes, Pete, on a farm or ranch, maybe.
A ranch — that's it, and so go back
To herdin' like I used to
When I was knee-high to a grasshopper.
You didn't know me then.
I was — well — sorter strange and shy-like with people.
Or that's the way
They used to make me out.
But the sheep would graze short grass about me;
The little woolly lambs, familiar-like,
Often they'd nose right in my pockets.
Pete, this thing's in my blood
And there's a million head o' maverick
A-grazin' in my heart.
To settle on a ranch —
That's wot I wanted for to win
Out of this game — a ranch
Wot I could call my own,
With title and deed, both stamped
Right through the paper by the Justice o' Peace.
No hidin' from the law this time,
No posse, trackin' you down with dogs
As knows your human smell.
No — no. I wanted peace to fall
Like evenin' around me and mine.
I wanted to be the boss
Of just a gang o' men
That likes to work together
And swap good yarns at evenin',
About a fire. — I wanted this,
But it wasn't to be. [*Pause.*

PETE. I beaded the engineer, didn't I?

COWCATCHER. It wasn't nobody's fault.
I think the State Police was aboard and nailed us cold.
(*Pause*) Or somethin' hit us.

PETE. So this is death?

COWCATCHER. Yes.

KID. Oh, something awful's going to happen!
PETE. Don't you go bawlin' all around the desert,
You chicken-livered, buff coyote!
You must be still alive.
KID (*joyfully*). You really think. . . . ?
PETE. Yes.
KID. Ah, God be thanked. Let's pray.
PETE. To wot?
KID. To God in Heaven.
PETE. Wot's Heaven?
KID. Why, Heaven —
COWCATCHER (*moodily*).
Heaven's for the livin', not the dead.
KID. It's a lie. Don't Scripture tell —
PETE. Say, wot you got again bein' dead?
[*Kid doesn't answer; his eyes are following some moving object in the distance.*
KID. Look! What's that?
PETE (*peering*). Somethin' lit up strong.
It's plungin' straight our way.
Let's put our ears down to the rails
And get her distance.
[*He dies so.*
COWCATCHER (*laughing*). We ain't on earth, old blowfire.
This layout here
Is twenty-six points
South of the human mind, I guess.
PETE. You ain't gone nutty, pardner?
Wot with the fog and firework stars
And comets trailin' red-hot whiskers after 'em?
KID. It's headin' straight this way.
What is it?
COWCATCHER. I dunno.
PETE. Maybe it's a star with a souse.
KID. A star?
COWCATCHER. A star? No, I'll be blowed,
It's the real thing: a sizzlin' comet.

PETE. With whiskers?
COWCATCHER (*wrapped in thought*).
Just wait. Suppose — suppose —
Why not? Why not?
PETE (*studying Cowcatcher's face*). What's up, Cowcatcher?
KID. Oh, I'm afraid.
PETE. Shut up, you holy toad.
COWCATCHER. We got to try it anyway.
It's only a scheme,
But it wouldn't be half bad
To think about when you is old,
With sleep instead of blood
Swimmin' through your veins.
PETE. A scheme! (*Kicking Kid*) A scheme!
COWCATCHER. A man ain't no ways dead, Pete,
If he can just keep on
A-spawnin' schemes
When he has died.
PETE. A big one, eh?
COWCATCHER. The biggest yet.
You know, I always wanted one big scoop
With a sure get-away.
Not for the swag so much
But just to finish a tough job
With no fag ends left over,
As clean as writin' with no blobs on it.
It's come at last!
PETE. Here? Now?
COWCATCHER. I thought that it'd come
In my lifetime.
Somethin' was there that waited
Smarter than you or me.
Somethin' that said "Not yet."
PETE. You ain't gone bughouse, pardner?
The fog ain't climbed inside your nut?
COWCATCHER (*in earnest low tones*).
The comet's tearin' straight this way.
She ain't gonnta stop. Pete, you know that.

PETE. Well, wot of it?
COWCATCHER (*clipping his words*).
We got to make her stop.
— Kid, Pete, pals, we've hitched
In this here game till all time
Or the red flacker o' Hell's flames.
You and me's gone through a lot,
But here's our biggest haul to pull yet:
We're going to hold up that there comet.
Get ready, both, stand back — no time to lose.
KID (*aghast*). My God!
PETE. He's outer his head.
COWCATCHER (*quivering with emotion*).
Old pals, the victories we tortures
From life is mean and picayune.
Ah, this is better!
In life we may put through
A deal in pigs or lambs,
Or play the red one day and win.
But then we always loses in the end,
'Cause there is somethin' we don't see
That gathers in the pot.
And if we sticks up trains
As we has done these many years,
The sharp-nosed bulls trails us across the hills
And runs us down, maybe, outside
The border bank where we has traded swag
For greenbacks. Life — life — bah!
There ain't no swollen pots in life.
A man's got to lose, come or go;
The dice is always loaded.
There's something off-stage, strange and still,
I dunno wot — it lurks around the turn.
The kitty wins.
I don't want money — never wanted it.
Just let me clean my job up,
Some jobs that robs the sleep from out your eyes,

That shoots up easy church-goin' in your heart
Unless you tackle it at once.

PETE. Plumb daffy!

COWCATCHER.

Get ready now. Crouch low. I'll give the signal.
My six-shooter — when I fire
You fall afoul of her.
You fellows got to yoke it now —
This time you can't afford to fail,
Or your gray ghosts will be clean riddled through
With lead.

[*He waves his gun drunkenly, Pete and Kid crouch, afraid. The comet is heard approaching.*

PETE (*in a hoarse whisper*). She's comin' nearer.

KID. She's giving off white fire;
We won't be able to stand it.

COWCATCHER. Get ready now.

[*The roar increases.*

KID (*with a frightened yell*).

We'll be destroyed! We sha'n't do it!
I tell you we sha'n't do it. Satan!

[*He hurls himself at Cowcatcher. Cowcatcher extends his hand and stops him. He seizes him by the shirt collar and dangles him cynically. At last he releases him.*

COWCATCHER. Muck!
No more of this.
Pete, get your tools out.

[*The roar is almost upon them. The atmosphere is forked by sudden flashes of blinding light.*

PETE (*hoarsely*). All right. I'm with you, pardner!

COWCATCHER.

At her! (*He discharges his gun*) Hold tight! Hold tight!

[*Kid shrieks hysterically. A swift white light floods everything. There is a tremendous swish, followed by stillness and utter darkness.*

KID (*unseen in the dark*). Oh! Oh! Where are we?
Where are we? Something awful must have happened.

PETE'S VOICE. Hell at last!
Are you with us, Cowcatcher? (*Pause*)
Speak up — speak up, if you are with us. (*Pause. Almost sobbing*) Wot would we do and you not with us, Cowcatcher?

COWCATCHER (*in a thin far-away voice*).
Hold tight! Hold tight! We're aboard her.

KID. Thank God, he's with us yet.

[*Sobs brokenly. A pale, doubtful light begins. It is but a faint suggestion of daylight, but it grows increasingly brighter and resolves itself into an intense sapphire blue. Then a hint of crimson and yellow and gold.*

Cowcatcher is discovered lying face downward at the foot of a tree, his arms flung tightly about the trunk. As daylight comes on, he turns slowly and looks up dazed. Pete is lying supine, a little to the right. He is mechanically clutching the grass and digging up sods with outstretched hands. Kid is curled up — a little forward — in what appears almost an unhuman ball. In the soft background a wheatfield is gradually becoming visible, bickering in the wind of dawn. The sun is rising.

COWCATCHER (*dazed*). I dunno — is this a tree?

PETE (*lifting his head with apparent difficulty*).
Wheat! Wheat! Flower smells — (*extending his hands*)
The feel o' dew on the young grass!
My God, I didn't know how much
I itched to lay my hands on earthy things!

KID (*whining, not daring to look up*). Where — where are we?

PETE. Look! Look! It's sun-up, as I live.
It's flame-born, gloryin' sun-up!

COWCATCHER (*bewildered*). Tree — wheat — sun-up!
Wot's it all mean?

PETE. Wot does it mean? Why this — is — is —

COWCATCHER. Wot?

PETE (*in an awed whipser*). Earth!

KID (*lifting his head for the first time, puzzled*). Earth?

PETE. Old sufferin' earth. It's earth, I tell you.

KID. Pete, you — you don't mean it.
You're not just kiddin' me
As you have always done. (*Pleading*)
Pete — Pete!
PETE (*with emphasis*). We's landed home.
COWCATCHER (*dimly realizing it*). Home! Home!
PETE. That somethin' off-stage, you was speakin' of
A while back, in that shiverin', empty place —
That somethin' was smarter
Than you or me, all right.
It looks as if we'd held up earth.
We didn't mean to, I know,
But here we are: you, me, and Kid,
Swirlin' through space on our birthplace star.
COWCATCHER. It was our biggest chance
This side millennium.
PETE. It was our biggest chance, you bet;
But here's the smooth green touch of summer grass.
COWCATCHER. The wind is sharp.
PETE. The uptake of a human day is in it, pardner.
COWCATCHER (*bitterly*). I don't want human days,
For what are human days to me?
I'm tired of peddlin' little jobs
I want to hold up worlds!
(*Sadly*) That's the teasin' way of it:
It holds sky-wingin' will-o'-the-wisps
Before your eyes, then yanks 'em straight away.
So wot you sees,
And wot you don't see,
Is nothin' but a blind.
KID (*on his knees*). Cowcatcher, we're *saved!*
To live, to be alive.
Why, that's the same as being saved.
COWCATCHER (*rising slowly*). Wot's your religion, Kid?
Wot's your wild hunger to touch things, Pete,
Alongside the dream I dreamed!

CURTAIN

THE ACCOMPLICE

ABIGAIL MARSHALL

Abigail Marshall was born in Melbourne, Australia. She started life as a pianiste and singer, but was soon diverted to the stage, appearing with George Rignold in "Henry V." She came to America, toured in many attractions, and created the rôle of *Alluna* in Rex Beach's "The Barrier" at the New Amsterdam Theatre, and was leading woman for the late James O'Neill.

Her one-act play, "Dad and Mother", was presented by Thomas Wise, and several other one-act plays have toured in vaudeville, one lately appearing at the Euston Theatre in London.

"The Accomplice" was dramatized from her own short story published in *Smart Set*. It won first prize at the annual competition of the Plays and Players Club, Philadelphia.

THE ACCOMPLICE

A PLAY

By ABIGAIL MARSHALL

Characters

Body (Jay Bragdon)
Brain
Soul
Thomas Brent, a detective
A Police Officer
A Bell Boy

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Applications for permission to produce "The Accomplice" must be addressed to Mrs. Greene, Provincetown, Mass., or her agent, Norman Lee Swartout, Summit, N. J.

THE ACCOMPLICE

The scene is a well-furnished bedroom in a large hotel. The bed is set head against the wall, foot reaching almost to center. There is a door leading to a corridor, beside which in back wall is electric switch. Another door leads to bathroom. There is a table on which are a lamp, writing materials, and a telephone. A coat tree with a lounging coat hanging on it. Chairs each side of table. A window in wall through which streams a white light. This light is focused on Soul and follows her all through the play, growing stronger as she speaks and paler when she is prostrated, but never entirely off her. When curtain rises, Soul is seen up right a little above bed. She is fair, ethereal, with quantities of pale hair, and dressed in white flowing robes. She is huddled in dejected attitude, her two arms forward, her head bent, her hair streaming over it, hiding her face. At the same time a key is heard turning and door from corridor opens. From light in corridor Body is seen, with Brain beside him. He enters and turns on electric switch which lights lamp on table and other light, a long bulb that swings down from ceiling, and which has cord knotted to keep it out of the way. Body is dressed in evening dress, with opera hat and overcoat. Brain, a tall, commanding, handsome brunette, wears long scarlet flowing garment. Body has a letter in his hand, which he keeps hold of, after taking coat and hat off and hanging them on tree.

BODY. Brain, Brain, my beloved, my adored!

[*She lets him embrace her.*

BRAIN. You do care for me — I am your only love?

BODY. I worship you — you are so wonderful, so exquisite, so magnificently formed.

BRAIN (*with arrogance*). I cannot pretend to be unconscious of my worth; I am all you say. But enough, you must read your letter now.

[*Body sits at right of table and opens letter, Soul half rises and leans toward him.*

BODY. Come close to me, beloved one, come closer.

[*Brain comes to left of table and watches Soul, who rises and comes to Body. Body passes hand over head as though faint.*

SOUL. Body — Body —

[*Body frowns and tries to concentrate attention on letter.*

BRAIN (*scoffing*). He does not hear you — you do not exist for him.

SOUL. Once he was mine, once he loved me, once he belonged solely to me.

BRAIN. That was before he learned to know my worth.

SOUL. Before you grew into a scarlet force.

BRAIN. A force that you must admit has conquered.

SOUL. I do not give up hope.

BRAIN. He loves me — he will never open his house to you again — I am the idol enshrined there.

SOUL. Worthless idols that have held higher places than you now occupy have been shattered and forgotten.

BRAIN. That fate cannot be mine. I am too strong.

SOUL. Yes, you are strong. Together you and I could have worked wonders with this man. But you were envious of my power —

BRAIN (*proudly*). I would reign alone. My power is all-sufficient. I can work wonders without your aid.

BODY (*who has been passing his hand over his eyes and vainly trying to decipher letter*). Brain, Brain, where are you?

BRAIN. Here, beloved Body — here.

BODY. I have been staring at this letter for an hour and cannot decipher a word of it.

BRAIN (*sitting left of table and leaning toward him*). Try again, dear, read.

[*Body braces up and Soul shrinks back, weakly subsiding until she has resumed her former position. Body glances at letter and rises suddenly.*

BODY. My God!

BRAIN. What is it?

BODY. It — it's from her.

BRAIN. Well — well — she loves you still, doesn't she?

BODY. Yes, but — but —

BRAIN. Come, come, control this foolish fear and tell me plainly what it is disturbs you. Sit down.

[*She rises and gazes sternly at him.*

BODY. That name — that name — (*whispering fearfully*) I thought I saw the name of that man.

BRAIN. You are always full of fancies — look again.

BODY (*afraid to look at letter*). What if she — if she has met him?

BRAIN. She loves you, she believes in you — obey me — listen to my counsel and she and her money will be yours within a year.

BODY (*weakly but fiercely turning on Brain*). They could be mine right now if you had let me marry her before.

BRAIN. You were not fit to marry her before. You'd have lost everything if I had not preached caution. Why, even now you are full of fear.

BODY. No — not fear — not fear.

BRAIN. What else is it? You are trembling.

[*Soul half rises, leans forward, and puts a pleading hand on his arm.*

BODY. I don't seem able to help it.

BRAIN. Throw off that hand of fear that is clutching you now and listen to me.

[*Body totters into chair, Soul rises, comes nearer, places hand on his shoulder. Body takes dope needle from pocket.*

BODY. I will — I will — this will calm me.

BRAIN. No, not that! You must do without that instrument, that thing chokes, stifles, paralyzes me! Put it away; put it away at once and promise me never to use it again.

BODY. I haven't strength enough, beloved Brain — just this once — just once more.

BRAIN. No — you have used that more than once too often already.

[*Soul has put one arm about his shoulder and now is clinging to him.*

BRAIN (*to Soul*). You won't get him, you won't get him, you won't get him!

BODY. Don't babble so, Brain, you confuse me.

[*Soul's arm curls closer round his neck.*

BRAIN. Throw away that thing and fling off that hand of fear that is trying now to choke you.

SOUL (*whispering to him*). It is your soul, dearest, not gross fear.

BODY (*to Brain, always unconscious of Soul*). I will — I will be strong.

[*Puts instrument in pocket, and with vicious strength throws Soul from him. She staggers and falls in heap at foot of bed.*

BRAIN. My brave one — my master again.

BODY (*kneeling, passionately imploring, at Brain's feet*). Teach me, great wonderful power that you are — counsel me now in this great crisis.

BRAIN (*softening*). You must be calm — otherwise I cannot guide you. (*She helps him rise and places him in chair; he controls himself*) That is better. Now, relate what I have done for you in the past.

BODY. Is that necessary?

BRAIN. Yes, it will make a firm foundation for you to build your faith upon, your faith in my perpetual, increasing power.

BODY. My faith in you, dear one, can never waver.

BRAIN. It is wavering now.

BODY. No — no, it is more fixed than the stars.

BRAIN. I know better. Do as I bid.

BODY. As you wish. It was by your aid I hid all trace of my crime. It was at your bidding I loved with my hands, my tongue, but kept my heart aloof. By your aid I appeared to adore while I destroyed her to whom I was apparently devoting my life. You alone hold the record of my every step in crime. No scrap of paper exists that can incriminate me. The poison itself was not more subtle

than I, thanks to your counsel. No living soul did I take into my confidence, except my own, and she lies dead — (*Soul moans*) But does she lie dead, beloved Brain?

BRAIN. So near dead you need never fear her interference. Rely upon me solely if you would succeed again where already you have been so successful.

BODY. But have I — but have I — this letter — ?

BRAIN. Ah, yes, the letter. Read the letter through and I'll dispose of that bugaboo also, whatever it may be. (*Telephone rings, Body looks up questioningly*) Answer it.

BODY (*into 'phone*). Yes? — Yes, this is Mr. Jay Bragdon. — Who? — Oh, how do you do? — Yes, certainly I remember you, Mr. Christie. — Another game of golf? — Why, I've never played a game of golf with you. — No, sir, I'm not joking. — I was beaten? — I could neither have lost nor won as I never even played. — You must be mistaken. — Wait a minute — wait. (*Hangs up*) He's rung off. Brain — Brain — did I play golf three days ago with Mr. Christie.

BRAIN (*who has risen, very perturbed, walking about clasping head*). I can't remember — I can't remember.

BODY. You must remember — you must remember — think — think!

BRAIN. I cannot think. (*Suddenly becomes bold*) This is of no consequence. What does it matter that you played a trivial game and have no recollection of the fact?

BODY. Do not fail me, Brain, you must not fail me!

BRAIN (*scornfully*). You have no faith! Have I failed in any vital matter? I only occupy myself with things of some concern.

BODY (*partly reassured*). Of course, beloved Brain, of course.

BRAIN. A forgotten game of golf is too absurb for you to stir up fears and worry me about.

BODY. I'm sorry — I'm truly penitent, beloved Brain.

BRAIN. I don't want you to be anything but strong; as long as you are healthy I can work. Read that letter and voice those fears that still, I see, possess you.

BODY. No — it is not fear — it's curiosity. If 'tis his name that's written there, why — why —

BRAIN (*angrily*). Who is this man whose power you seem to rank above my own?

BODY. You know who he is — the greatest detective in the country.

BRAIN. What if he is? Haven't we rejoiced together because we have outwitted him? Outwitted him without his even knowing it! Thomas Brent, the hunter of criminals, who doesn't even know that a crime, now six months old, was committed.

BODY. Don't talk so openly about it, I beg of you; it makes me shiver.

BRAIN. Shiver? Is that how you welcome your triumph? Poor weak Body! And I was proud to have you for my devotee, and was ready in return to worship you. I called you master!

BODY. Don't flay me with your scorn, beloved; you are all I have in the world to love.

BRAIN. You have money, friends, the sister of a dead wife worshiping you —

BODY. All of which I owe to you.

BRAIN. The respect of the world you adorn. They call you Jay Bragdon, the devoted husband. Your constant attendance upon your wife is still the theme of Society gossip — the admiration of that circle knows no bounds. You could go among them and take your choice of wealthy spinsters if you had not been so foolish as to choose already the sister of your dead wife.

BODY. It was partly a sentiment I could not control.

BRAIN (*searchingly*). But you have it now eliminated?

BODY. Yes. Didn't I tell you my heart was atrophied? She is nothing to me now but a money bag.

BRAIN. Good. You could, if necessary, choose elsewhere then?

BODY. Yes, but would it be wise?

BRAIN. Why not?

BODY. If anything should happen to come to light she would be silent for her own sake if she were my wife.

BRAIN. It is impossible that anything should become known. I have left not the slightest loophole for a piece of evidence, however slight, to leak through.

BODY. I am sure of that.

BRAIN. But have your way, marry the sister.

BODY (*mechanically taking cocaine needle out again and filling it*). Yes, yes — I want to marry her soon.

BRAIN. Not until you have thrown that in the fire though.

BODY (*looking blankly at instrument*). This — this? I — I didn't know I had it in my hand.

BRAIN (*alarmed*). That won't do — that won't do — throw it away, now — now!

BODY. No, not now — not now — I will — I will throw it away — but not just yet — not now. (*Puts it away*) We are forgetting the letter.

BRAIN. I forget nothing. Read on.

[*Rises and walks about, perturbed.*

BODY (*with difficulty, trying to read*). "Dear, dearest Jay" — I can't seem to read it, it's all blurred. (*Looking up*) Don't walk about like that — come here to me — no wonder I can't make it out. (*Brain comes to table and stands, Body starts up*) My God!

BRAIN (*commandingly*). Stop that! What does she say?

BODY. It is his name, the hateful name of Thomas Brent is written there.

BRAIN. What else?

BODY. I don't know — I don't know. Thomas Brent — Thomas Brent — why should his name be in her letter?

BRAIN. Let us lay this ghost at once. Thomas Brent is only a man, with a body like you and a brain not to be compared to me. Let us laugh at Thomas Brent — laugh, I command you. (*Body tries to laugh, fails, falls weakly into chair — Soul creeps toward him on her knees, but Brain dashes across and stands between them, commandingly over Body*) Laugh! Laugh at the name of Thomas Brent, the detective we have

outwitted. Rise, beloved Body, and be strong — (*Body staggers to his feet, recovers strength, and Soul shrinks back*) Laugh! Now laugh! (*Body laughs, deliriously at first, then more heartily*) Good, good. Now read the letter slowly through, and be calm.

BODY. "Dearest Jay — I am forbidden to tell you something I think you ought to know" —

[*Stops, trying to decipher letter.*

BRAIN. What is it — what is it?

BODY. That half-page is blurred, as though tears had been shed upon it.

BRAIN. Beware, don't tread upon the thin ice of sentiment again.

BODY. 'Tis not my tread, but hers — her sister's name is here.

BRAIN. But why has Thomas Brent's name been mentioned?

BODY (*reading*). "Thomas Brent has been to see her." Been to see her — why?

BRAIN. Read on — read on.

BODY (*reading*). "In response to an anonymous letter received by him, evidently written by the same mysterious party that sent me that telegram two weeks ago, for 'twas signed the same — Accomplice."

BRAIN. Well?

BODY. Who wrote that anonymous letter, Brain? Who calls himself Accomplice?

BRAIN. Some crazy fool — the world is full of them. Didn't you tell her to burn that telegram and not act on its instructions to call on Thomas Brent?

BODY. I did, and she obeyed me. But he — he has called on her. Who could have written that anonymous letter and sent that telegram? Who is Accomplice?

BRAIN. No — one — you have no accomplice.

[*Knock heard on corridor door.*

BODY. What's that?

BRAIN. Don't start and shiver at every sound. Change your coat and open the door.

BODY (*pulling himself together, quickly gets into lounging coat, Brain helping him*). Who is it?

BOY (*without*). Mr. Bragdon?

BODY (*opening door as Brain pushes him toward it*). What do you want?

BOY (*entering*). Please, sir, Mr. Christie says will you return his fountain pen?

BODY. His pen? I haven't got his pen.

BOY. He says to please forgive him for disturbing you so late, but he's been called away and is leaving on the midnight train.

BODY. But I haven't got his pen — the man's crazy.

BOY. He said you borrowed it a week ago yesterday, sir.

BODY. A week ago — a week ago?

BOY. Yes, you wrote two letters with it in his room, he says, but you went out to look up one of the addresses, and you took his pen away with you.

BODY. What did I do a week ago yesterday?

[*Turns to Brain; she walks up and down distractedly, head in hands. Boy doesn't see Brain or Soul, but steps down to table.*

BRAIN. I cannot think — I can't remember.

BODY. You must remember. What did I do a week ago yesterday?

BOY. The taxi is waiting for Mr. Christie, sir; he hasn't much time.

BODY. I don't remember writing two letters last week.

BOY (*picking pen from table*). Why, here it is, sir.

BODY. What?

BOY. Yes, sir — see, his initials are on it like he said — F. C. — Frederick Christie. Isn't this it?

BODY. Yes, yes — of course — I'd forgotten — please give Mr. Christie my apologies for not returning it before — tell him I've been suffering from a severe nervous headache and I've been forgetting everything —

BOY. Yes, sir.

BODY (*tipping him*). And thank him.

BOY. Yes, sir, he was terribly sorry to have to disturb you —

BODY. That's all right — that's all right — (*Hustles boy off and turns to Brain*) Another! What do you make of that? Another lapse! Brain, Brain, for God's sake don't desert me.

BRAIN. Don't be a fool. You exaggerate trifles into tragedies. Sit down. Compose yourself. We have the future to think of, new plans, maybe, to make. Go on with that letter.

BODY. Yes — yes — but — but — yes — I will — But what did I write two letters for last week, and to whom?

BRAIN. I remember that quite well; you wrote to your tailor, whose address you had forgotten, and to her.

BODY (*with relief*). Yes, yes — that must have been it.

BRAIN. Of course that was it. Go on now with the letter. [*Body is trembling so he can't pick up the letter — he takes needle from pocket.*

BODY. I must — I must — the strain is too great.

BRAIN. Nonsense — rubbish — there is no strain. Put that away — put it away, I command you! (*Body cringes, and at length puts away needle*) Now take up that letter and continue — take it up — steady your hand — aren't you ashamed to be so weak?

BODY. Yes — yes, I am ashamed — I am ashamed — (*Gradually steadies himself and takes up letter — reads*) "Oh, my love, if you could only read between the lines what I have not dared to write, what I've been wanting to tell you for days — but for the sake of my immortal soul I have been silent — I gave my word of honor not to speak —"

BRAIN. What folly, what trash! If I could only get control of her for a moment she would speak. Well?

BODY (*who has been peering close to letter*). Something's been written and then erased.

BRAIN. You must decipher it.

BODY. I cannot.

BRAIN. Have you a magnifying glass?

BODY. There's writing over it.

BRAIN. Alcohol and a sponge. (*Body goes off down left a moment, returns with bottle, sponge, and sits and wets letter slightly with sponge and alcohol. Brain opens drawer in table at same time and uses magnifying glass*) There is nothing to fear, but we may as well know everything. Wise men listen to the cackle of fools if only to laugh at it and learn more wisdom.

[*Body brings down hanging electric bulb close to paper and looks through magnifying glass which he takes from Brain. Suddenly scatters glass, paper, etc., right and left and shrieks, leaping to his feet.*

BODY. Disinterred! Disinterred!

[*Brain claps hand over his mouth. Soul revives, tries to rise, but Brain stands between her and Body, deliberately on guard.*

BRAIN. Hush! Are you mad?

BODY (*clinging to Brain*). Save me — save me — they are going to disinter the body — perhaps it's really done.

BRAIN. Absurd. She would have written and told you before.

BODY. No — she promised — she wanted to tell me — how long ago did she say?

BRAIN. What if they do disinter it?

BODY. I should have had it cremated.

BRAIN. I thought of that, you know.

BODY. Yes, I'm not reproaching you. Save me — save me!

BRAIN. But she left strict commands about her burial in her will — you dared not act against them.

BODY. No — no — but now — now — what's to be done?

BRAIN. The first thing to be done is for you to calm yourself. Then you will listen to me.

BODY. Yes — yes — I'll be calm.

BRAIN. Control yourself.

BODY. I'll be calm when you can reassure me, counsel me.

BRAIN. Reassure you? Of course I can reassure you. Do you realize that, thanks to me, there is not a scrap of evidence existing against you?

BODY. Oh, yes, yes — that's right — that's right.

BRAIN. You are not the ordinary murderer who sows blunders with his crime.

BODY. No, no — that's true. But the letter, telegram, signed "Accomplice"?

BRAIN. You have had no accomplice but me.

BODY. No — that's true — only you. There is no one to betray me?

BRAIN. There is no one, and nothing can betray you. Common murderers bungle because they do not eliminate emotion. Sentiment, fear, impatience, overconfidence, passion, befuddles their brain — but I am clean from every such fog.

BODY. You are wonderful, my adored one, I worship you!

BRAIN. Then trust me — trust me completely.

BODY. I will — I will. Oh, I'm so tired — I must rest now — I must rest.

BRAIN. Rest? Oh, no, there's much to be thought of, much to plan.

BODY (*reeling toward bed*). I can do no more, I am exhausted.

[*Falls on bed. Brain pulls him up and makes him stand. Soul never abandons hope, but without strength to rise watches for opportunity to approach Body.*

BRAIN. Listen. Do you remember how, at the start, when you first met your wife, I said — "Here's your chance, Jay, if you don't let yourself love her" —

BODY. Don't — don't — let me go — let me rest —

[*Tries to push Brain away, but she clings to him.*

BRAIN. "You can take advantage of her first spell of sickness — women always have one sometime" —

BODY. Leave me alone now; we've gone over all that before — it's no use re-living it now —

BRAIN. "To administer a tiny dose of our own" — and you carried that plan out under my direction —

BODY. I must get some rest — some sleep — I must.

[*Breaks away and sits on bed.*

BRAIN (*following him*). And you alone nursed her—you were so devoted she would have no one else.

BODY. Let me sleep, beloved Brain.

BRAIN. The poison you had gathered from different cities in very small quantities; no two visits did you pay in one place, and your information too, how to administer it safely without arousing suspicion, you secured from libraries all over the country. Not a book on the subject have you ever had in your possession. Not one scrap of paper in your handwriting exists with even one of their titles.

[*Body, unseen by Brain, takes out needle and uses it.*

BODY. I must sleep — I must sleep — I cannot endure the strain.

BRAIN (*suddenly wilting*). I'm tired too — but no — I cannot be — I never grow tired — I — yet something bothers me — I must leave you for a minute — I — I cannot stay —

[*She staggers left and finally falls in a heap on floor. Body draws a long breath and lies down. Soul rises, creeps toward Body, and then leans over him.*

SOUL. In your weakness I find my strength. Don't shut me out any longer, Beloved — let me live — save me — make me strong again — let me live — let me live. (*Body stirs*) Give me back my immortal right to live.

[*Body rises in stupor and goes to 'phone.*

BODY. Hello? Send up a boy with a telegraph blank, will you? I want to send a wire.

[*Hangs up.*

SOUL. You will come back to me?

BODY (*ignoring her*). Where is my beloved Brain, I wonder.

SOUL. She sleeps. Let her rest. She is a scarlet counselor. Hand in hand she and I could work together and perform miracles in the mortal world if she would only listen at times to me. But she is arrogant, proud; she wants to be queen over all and rule alone.

BODY. There's a peculiar singing in my ears — if only my beloved Brain were here, she'd tell me what it was.

SOUL. It is I, Body; it is I, your long-neglected Soul.

BODY. I wish it would go away — I'm so tired. (*Knock at door — he opens it — admits Boy with blank and pencil*) Oh, it's you — come in.

[*Takes pencil and writes.*

SOUL. Dearest Body, I'm growing stronger now.

BODY (*to boy*). What?

BOY. I didn't speak, sir.

BODY. I thought you did. How soon will that be delivered?

[*Giving boy telegram.*

BOY (*looking at address*). In an hour, sir, or less maybe.

BODY. Tell them to rush it.

[*Soul puts arms around Body and whispers.*

BOY. Yes, sir.

[*Turns to go.*

BODY. Oh, Boy?

BOY. Yes, sir?

BODY. Ask the clerk to send that message by 'phone for me — I'm too tired to do it myself.

BOY. Yes, sir, very well, sir.

[*Boy exits. Body comes to table and sits, head in hands, moans.*

BODY. Oh, I'd sell my soul for one hour's dreamless sleep.

SOUL (*over him at back*). 'Tis only while you sleep your soul can live.

BODY (*rising and going to bed*). Voices, always voices, sleeping or waking.

[*Shows signs of drug's effect wearing off and Brain half rises.*

BRAIN. Beloved Body, where are you?

BODY. I'm tired — I'm tired — I must have rest.

BRAIN (*rising, sees Soul*). I thought you were gone forever.

SOUL. I am stronger now than you.

[*Comes down.*

BRAIN. Are you? We shall see. Body, beloved, I am coming to help you.

[*Tries to pass Soul, but Soul stands so Brain cannot see Body, who is now seated on the side of the bed using the needle.*

As he punctures his arm, Brain staggers back to former position and lies huddled on floor, moaning. Body falls across bed asleep.

BRAIN (*as she is staggering backward*). How can you stand there smiling while our Body is sinning, sinning?

SOUL. Material sin cannot touch me — only sin against the Everlasting God can destroy my immortal life.

[*Brain lies moaning in a heap. There is a terrific knock on door. Body does not move; it is repeated, then a key is heard and door opens. Police officer enters, stands at door on guard, and Thomas Brent in plain clothes comes in. Bell boy stands at back. Brent has the telegraph form in hand.*

BRENT. You're wanted, Jay Bragdon. (*Soul places a hand on Body's shoulder and he stirs*) Jay Bragdon, wake up, you're wanted.

[*Body moves, sits up, turns, rubs eyes, and stares.*

BODY. Who are you?

BRENT. My name's Brent — Thomas Brent.

BODY (*dazed*). Thomas — Thomas Brent?

BRENT. Yes, I think you've heard of me before.

BODY. Oh, my Brain, my Brain, my Brain! (*Brain rises, is very weak, staggers across to Body. He clutches her. Brent and the others do not see either Soul or Brain*) What am I to do?

BRENT. Get your coat and hat on; you're wanted.

[*Boy gets coat and hat for Body. Body lets him help him with coat.*

BODY. What for — what for — what am I wanted for?

BRENT. For murder. You murdered your wife six months ago.

[*Brain whispers to Body who tries to bluster.*

BODY. You are insane to make such a charge — insane, I tell you. We were the most devoted couple in our set — everybody will laugh at you — (*Clinging convulsively to Brain*) You can have no evidence to warrant such a ridiculous charge.

BRENT. No evidence, man? Do *you* say that?

BODY. Certainly I say that — I repeat, you have no evidence. (*Brain still whispering, but weakening while he clings, one arm around her — she is now on his right; Soul creeps to his left side, puts arm around him. He tries to free himself as though he is choking, tries with arm to cling to Brain, who slips, slips from his grasp, while with his left he grapples with Soul. He talks wildly, frenziedly, without taking his eyes from Brent*) Ha-ha — it's too absurd, it's really ridiculous, not to be taken seriously — you will be laughed out of court, hounded out of your profession — (*Suddenly changing from sneering to bravado*) My man, you'll have to answer for this outrage, do you realize that? You'll have to answer to me, do you hear? And also answer to an indignant world that will not brook an innocent man, whose character has always been above reproach, being impugned, in so brutal a fashion too, — my rest disturbed, my privacy invaded — my — my — my — me — me — (*He babbles incoherently as Brain slips from his grasp, and finds words as he clutches her again. Now she slips almost lifeless left, and using both hands he tries to strangle Soul, whom he has by this time got down to her knees*) I will fight for my freedom — fight — fight — what is fight? — evidence — evidence — no — no evidence — what is evidence? —

BRENT (*taking letters from pocket and showing them to Body, who stares at them wildly. Soul, with extreme effort, recovers and rises, Brain moans*). This is evidence enough, I think — every record of your crime, step by step, from the moment of its inception in your brain — the drug stores patronized, the libraries visited, the books consulted and thumbed by you — all signed Accomplice. Do you recognize the handwriting, Mr. Bragdon?

[*Brain rises on her elbow — Body stares at paper, then shrieks.*

BODY. It is my own, my own — my own! (*Brain falls back lifeless — Body makes a dash with clawlike fingers at Brent's throat. Soul rises straight and stands between them. Body*

staggers back over foot of bed. Brent signs to Officer, who comes forward and pulls Body to his feet, standing at Body's right) Something is gone — something is gone — I am so tired and weak.

[*Totters.*

SOUL (*tenderly*). Lean on me.

BODY. Who are you? Why, you are beautiful! I never saw you before, did I? Who are you?

SOUL. I am your immortal soul.

BODY. My soul — my soul — I didn't know — I have something beautiful left — my soul — I'm so tired.

SOUL. With me you will find peace and rest. Lean on me now.

BRENT. Poor devil, no wonder he was wiring to me — (*Reading telegraph form*) "For God's sake come and take me." Go ahead, Officer, I guess he can walk.

[*Soul places Body's arm about her neck and supports him.*

OFFICER (*picking up Body's hat and taking his other arm*). He seems stronger now.

[*They start up-stage, Brent following.*

SOUL. Oh, yes, he's stronger now.

CURTAIN

THE JUDGMENT OF INDRA

DHAN GOPAL MUKERJI

Dhan Gopal Mukerji was born in Calcutta of pure Brahmin stock. He matriculated at the University of Calcutta and remained there until the great exodus of students to the University of Tokyo, where he studied textile engineering. He remained there for one year and then came to the decision that he did not care for the life of an engineer. He came to America and entered the University of California. Later he took his Bachelor of Arts degree at Leland Stanford University. He has since been on the lecture platform.

His books of verse are "Sandhya", "Rajani", and "Maylaylanajnu." He has published a volume of children's stories entitled "Kari, the Elephant", and "Caste and Outcast", an autobiographic work.

THE JUDGMENT OF INDRA

A PLAY

By DHAN GOPAL MUKERJI

Characters

SHANTA
SHUKRA
KANADA
OLD MAN

TIME. The Fifteenth Century
PLACE. A Monastery on one of the foothills of Himalaya

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Applications for permission to produce "The Judgment of Indra" should be addressed to the author, Dhan Gopal Mukerji, care of Stewart Kidd Company, Cincinnati, Ohio. No performance may be given without his consent.

THE JUDGMENT OF INDRA

SCENE. *In the foreground is the outer court of a Monastery. In the center of the court is a sacred plant growing out of a small altar of earth about two feet square. On the left of the court is a sheer precipice, adown which a flight of stone steps — only a few of which are visible — connects the Monastery with the village in the valley below.*

To the right are the Temple and the adobe walls and the roof of the Monastery cells. There is a little space between the Temple and the adobe walls, which is the passage leading to the inner recesses of the Monastery. Several steps lead to the doors of the Temple, which give on the court. In the distance, rear, are the snowy peaks of the Himalayas, glowing under the emerald sky of an Indian afternoon. To the left, the distances stretch into vast spaces of wooded hills. Long bars of light glimmer and die as vast clouds, with edges of crimson, golden and silver, spread portentously over the hills and forest. A roll of thunder in the distance accompanies the rise of the curtain.

SHANTA (*he is reading a palm-leaf manuscript near the Sacred Plant. He looks up at the sky*). It forebodes a calamity. [*Suddenly the Temple doors open. Shukra stands framed in the doorway. Seeing that Shanta is alone, Shukra walks down the steps toward him.*

SHUKRA. Are you able to make out the words?

SHANTA. Aye, Master.

SHUKRA. Where is Kanada?

SHANTA. He will be here presently. Listen, Master: it sayeth: "Only a hair's breadth divides the true from the false. Upon him who by thought, word, or deed confuses the two, will descend the Judgment of Indra."

SHUKRA. The thunder of Indra is just. It will strike the erring and the unrighteous no matter where they hide

themselves; in the heart of the forest or in the silence of the cloisters, Indra's Judgment will descend on them. Even the erring heart that knows not that it is erring will be smitten and chastised by Indra.

[*Thunder rumbles in the distance.*

SHANTA. Master, when you speak, you not only fill the heart with ecstasy, but also the soul with the beauty of truth.

SHUKRA. To praise is good. But why praise me, who have yet to find God and —

[*Shakes his head sadly.*

SHANTA. You will find Him soon; your time is nigh.

SHUKRA. I wish it were true.

SHANTA. Master, if there be anything that I can do for you. If I could only lighten your burden a little —

SHUKRA. Thou hast done that already. All the cares of the Monastery thou hast taken from me. Thou hast bound me to thee by bonds of gratitude that can never break. (*Enter Kanada*) Ah, Kanada, how be it with you to-day? [*Coming to him.*

KANADA (*he is a lad of twenty and two*). By your blessing I am well and at peace. Have you finished your meditation?

SHUKRA (*sadly*). Nine hours have I meditated, but — I shall say the prayers now.

[*Enters the Temple and shuts the door.*

KANADA. He seems not to be himself.

SHANTA. When he is in meditation for a long time, he becomes another being.

KANADA. There is sadness in his eyes.

SHANTA. How can he be sad, — he who has risen above joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, hate and love?

KANADA. Above love, too?

SHANTA. Yea, hate and love being opposite, are Maya, illusion!

KANADA. Yet we must love the world.

SHANTA. Yea, that we do to help the world.

KANADA. The Master is tender to the villagers even if they lead the worldly life.

SHANTA. We be monks. We have broken all the ties of the world, even those of family, so that we can bestow our thoughts, care, and love upon all the children of God. Our love is impartial.

[*The thunder growls in the distance.*

KANADA. Yea, that is the truth. Yet I think the Master loves thee more than any other.

SHANTA. Nay, brother. He loves no one more than another. I have been with him ten years; that makes him depend on me. But if the truth were known, — he loves none. For he loves all. Indra, be my witness: the Master loveth no one more than another.

KANADA. Ah, noble-souled Master! Yet I feel happy to think that he loveth thee more than any.

SHANTA. He loves each living creature. He is not as the worldly ones who love by comparison — this one more, the other less. Last night, as the rain wailed without like a heart-broken woman, how his voice rose in song of light and love! He is one of God's prophets, and a true singer of His praise.

KANADA. I can hear him yet.

SHANTA. I will never forget the ineffable joy that glowed in his words. Only he who has renounced all ties, can speak with such deep and undying love. No anxiety —

KANADA. It was that of which I would speak to thee. Dost thou not see sadness and anxiety in the Master's face?

SHANTA. He is deep in thought — naught else.

KANADA. Ever since that message was brought him the other day, he has seemed heavy-hearted. It was melancholy tidings.

SHANTA. Nay, that message had naught to do with him.

[*Thunder growls. The Temple doors open. Shukra comes out of the Temple and shuts the doors behind him. Then he stands still in front of the Temple.*

SHUKRA (*calling*). Kanada.

KANADA. Yea, Master.

[*He goes up to Shukra, who gives him some directions. Kanada exits; Shukra stands looking at the sky.*

SHANTA. How wonderful a vision he is! As he stands at the threshold of the Temple he seems like a new God, another divinity come down to earth to lead the righteous on to the realms celestial. Ah, Master, how grateful am I to have thee as my teacher! I thank Brahma for giving thee to me.

[*Enter Kanada. Shukra then walks to Shanta, with Kanada following him.*

KANADA. Master, all is ready.

SHUKRA. Go ye to the village; ask them if all be well with them. When the heavens are unkind — ah, if it rains another day all the crops will be destroyed — what will they live on? No, no, it cannot be. Go ye both down to them and take them my blessings. Tell them we will make another offering to Indra to-night. It must not rain any more.

SHANTA. Bring out begging bowls, Kanada.

KANADA. Shall I bring the torches, too?

[*Crossing.*

SHUKRA. The clouds may hide the moon; yea, the torches, too. (*Kanada exits right*) Yea. (*Thunder growls above*) The storm grows apace. I hope thou wilt find shelter ere it breaks. (*A short silence*) The world is growing darker and darker each day. Sin and Vice are gathering around it like a vast coiling Serpent. We monks be the only ones that can save it and set it free. Shanta, be steadfast; strengthen me. Help me to bring the light to the world. Thou art not only my disciple, but my friend and brother. (*He embraces Shanta*) Save me from the world.

KANADA (*entering*). Here be —

[*Stops in surprise.*

SHUKRA (*releasing Shanta*). Come to me, Kanada. (*The latter does so, Shukra, putting an arm around Kanada's neck*) Little Brother —

KANADA (*radiantly*). Master —

SHUKRA. Be brave and free — free from the delusions of

this world, Sansara. Go yet to the village; take them our blessings! Hari be with them all! May ye return hither safely. (*Thunder and lightning*) Ah, Lord Indra! — Look, it is raining yonder. Go, hasten —

SHANTA (*taking a begging bowl and torch from Kanada*). Come!

SHUKRA (*putting his hands on their heads*). I bless ye both. May Indra protect ye —

[*The rest of his words are drowned by the lightning flash and peal of thunder.*

The two disciples intone: "OM Shanti OM." They go down the steps.

SHUKRA. May this storm pass. OM Shiva. Shiva love you, my Shanta. For ten long years he has been with me; he has greatly helped me in my search after Him who is the only living Reality. To-day I am nearer God — I stand at the threshold of realization. I seem to feel that it will not be long before the Veil will be lifted and I shall press my heart against the heart of the ultimate mystery — Who comes there? (*Listens attentively*) They cannot have gone and come back so soon. Ha! another illusion! These days I am beset by endless illusions. Perhaps that betokens the end of my search, as the gloom is always thickest ere the dawn. Yea, after this will come the Light; I will see God! (*Hears a noise; listens attentively*) Are they already returning? (*Calling*) Shanta!

[*He crosses and looks down. Thunder rolls very loudly now. He does not heed that. Suddenly he recoils in agitation. Footsteps are heard from below, rising higher and higher. Shukra rubs his eyes to make sure that he has really seen something that is not an illusion. He goes forward a few steps. The head of an old man rises into view. Shukra is stupefied; walks backwards until his back touches the Sacred Plant. He stands still. The old man at last climbs the last step. He has not noticed Shukra. He looks at the Himalayas in the rear. Then his eyes travel over the Monastery walls — Now suddenly they catch sight of Shukra.*

SHUKRA. What seek ye here?

OLD MAN (*eying him carefully*). Ah, Shukra! dost thou not recognize thine aged father?

[*He goes to Shukra with outstretched arms.*

SHUKRA. I have no father.

OLD MAN. But I am thy father. Did not my messenger come the other day? (*Silence*) Did he lie to me? Dost thou not know thy mother is —

SHUKRA. Thy messenger came.

OLD MAN. Then come thou home at once. There is no time to be lost. Come, my son, ere thy mother leaves this earth.

SHUKRA. I cannot go.

OLD MAN. Thou canst not go? Dost thou not know that thy mother is on her deathbed?

SHUKRA. I have renounced the world. For twelve years I have had no father, nor mother.

OLD MAN. Thou didst leave us, but we did not renounce thee. And now thou shouldst come.

SHUKRA. I told thy messenger that I have no father nor mother, — I cannot come.

OLD MAN. I heard it all. If thou art born of us, thou canst not have a heart of stone. Come, my son: I, thy father, implore thee.

SHUKRA. Nay, nay; God alone is my father.

OLD MAN. Hath it not been said in the scriptures that thy parents are thy God? Thy father should be obeyed.

SHUKRA. That was said by one who had not seen the Truth, the Light.

OLD MAN. I command thee in the name of the scriptures.

SHUKRA. God alone can command me.

OLD MAN. Vishnu protect me! Art thou dreaming, my child? Yonder lies thy mother, fighting death —

SHUKRA. I have heard it all.

OLD MAN. And yet thou wilt not go?

SHUKRA. Nay, father, I cannot go. The day I took the vow of a monk, that day I cut the bond that binds me to

you all. I must be free of all ties. I must love none for myself that I may love all for God. Here I must remain where God has placed me, until He calls me elsewhere.

OLD MAN. But thy mother lies, fighting with each breath. She wishes to see thee.

SHUKRA. I cannot come.

OLD MAN. But thou must.

SHUKRA. I would if I could; but my life is in the hands of God.

OLD MAN (*mocking*). God! Thy life belongs to God? Who gave thee life? Not God, but she who lies there dying; what ingratitude! This, indeed, is the age of darkness; sons are turning against their fathers, — and killing their own mothers.

SHUKRA (*quietly*). I may not love one more than another; my steps, as my heart, go whither God guides them.

OLD MAN (*mocking*). Truth is thy witness?

SHUKRA. May Indra himself punish me if I love one more than another. Hear me, Indra.

[*The roll of thunder above.*

OLD MAN (*in desperation*). Come, my son, in the name of thine own God I pray to thee, come to thy mother. I kneel at thy feet and beg for this boon.

[*He does so.*

Shukra raises him to his feet. He puts his own head down on the old man's feet.

OLD MAN. Then thou comest?

[*Shukra rises to his feet.*

SHUKRA (*hesitating*). There is a law in the Sacred books that says an ascetic should see the place of his birth every twelfth year.

OLD MAN. And it is twelve years now since thou didst renounce us! Ah! blessed be the law.

SHUKRA. Yet, father, if I go, I go not in obedience to the law, but since the desire to see my mother is uppermost in me, I who dreamt not of the law hitherto — yea, now I hasten to abide by the law. Ah, what mockery! It is

not the letter of the law, but the spirit in us that judges us sinners or saints. Now if I go with thee to obey the law, that would be betraying the law.

OLD MAN. Betraying the law!

SHUKRA. Thought alone is the measure of our innocence. He who thinks evil is a doer of evil indeed. Nay, nay, tempt me not with the law. I must remain here. I must keep my vow.

[*He looks up to heaven; it is covered with enormous black clouds.*

OLD MAN. The law is not written in the heavens. It is inscribed in the heart of man. Obey the dictates of thy heart.

SHUKRA. God alone shall be obeyed. I cannot betray His command. I, who am an ascetic, must not yield to the desire to see my mother — Nay! God —

OLD MAN. What manner of God is He that deprives a dying mother of her son? Such a God never was known in Hindu life. No such God lives, nor breathes.

[*Thunder and lightning.*

SHUKRA. Erring Soul, do not blaspheme your creator. He is the God of Truth — God of Love.

OLD MAN (*disdainfully*). God of Love, — How can He be God of Love if He dries up the stream of thy heart and blinds thy reason as the clouds blind the eyes of the Sun? Nay, thou liest. It is not the God of Love, but the God of thine insane self — self-love that makes thee rob thy mother of her only joy in life. I — yea, I will answer to God for thee. If, by coming to see thy mother, thou sinnest, I ask God to make me pay for thy sin. Come, obey thy father, — I will take the burden of thy sin, if sin it be.

SHUKRA. Nay, each man pays for his sins as each man reaps the harvest of his own good deeds. None can atone for another. Ah, God! cursed be the hour when I was born. Cursed —

OLD MAN (*angrily*). Thou cursest thy birth?

SHUKRA. Yea, to be born in this world of woe is a curse indeed.

OLD MAN. Then curse thy tormented mind and thy desolate heart; curse not, —

SHUKRA. Nay, I curse the hour that saw me come to this earth of delusion and Maya. I do curse —

OLD MAN. Thou dost dare curse the hour when thou wert born! Ah, vile sinner! To curse the hour of thy birth when thy mother is dying! God be my witness, he has incurred his father's wrath. Now, — no god can save thee.

SHUKRA. Nay, nay —

OLD MAN. Shukra, I, thy father, thy God in life, curse thee. Thou hast deprived thy mother of her child, and her death of its solace. Thou hast incurred the wrath of the Spirits of all thy departed ancestors.

SHUKRA (*cries out*). Not thus; not thus.

[*Thunder and lightning, the whole sky is swept by the clouds.*

OLD MAN. Not thus? Thus alone shall it be. Cursed be thou at night; cursed be thou by day; cursed be thou going; cursed be thou coming. Thou are cursed by the spirit of the race, by the spirit of God.

[*Continued thunder and lightning.*

SHUKRA (*falling at his father's feet*). I beseech thee, my father, —

OLD MAN (*shrinking away*). Touch me not. (*Going left*) Cursed art thou in Life and Death forever.

SHUKRA. God! — Father, go not thus.

OLD MAN. I am not thy father.

[*Deafening and blinding thunder and lightning.*

SHUKRA. Father —

OLD MAN (*going down steps*). Pollute not my hearing by calling me thy father. May the Judgment of Indra be upon thee!

[*He totters down out of sight, left, in anger and horror.*

SHUKRA. Father, hear, oh, hear! (*The rain comes down in a deluge; thunder and lightning. The rain blots everything out of sight. It pours in deep, dark sheets, through which the*

chains and sheets of lightning burn and run. After raining awhile, the sky clears. In the pale moonlight, Shukra is seen crouching near the Sacred Plant. He is wet and disheveled. He slowly rises, swaying in exhaustion. Voices are heard below) Can it be that it is over? Has Indra judged me and found me free of error? Yea, were I in error, the lightning would have struck me. I lay there blinded by rain, awaiting my death. It did not come. Yea, Indra has judged! (*Noises below; he does not hear*) Oh, thou shadowy world, I am free of thee at last. Free of love and loving, free of all bondage. I have no earthly ties, — I lean on God alone. At last, I am bound to no earthly being, not even — (*strange pause*) not even — Shanta. (*He becomes conscious of the noise of approaching footsteps and the light of the torches from below*) Who is that?

[*He goes forward a few steps. Enter Kanada, torch in hand.*

KANADA. Master, Master.

SHUKRA. Kanada, thou — (*A pause, very brief but poignant*) Why this agitation? Shanta, where is Shanta?

KANADA. Shanta is —

SHUKRA (*seeing the other torches rising suddenly*). Speak! Who comes hither?

KANADA. They bring a dead man.

SHUKRA. Who is he? (*As a premonition of the truth comes over him*) Where is Shanta?

KANADA (*blurts out*). At the foot of the hill the lightning struck him.

SHUKRA (*with a terrible cry*). Shanta, — my Shanta! (*Two men carrying torches with one hand, and dragging something white with the other, come up the steps. This vision silences Shukra. A pause follows. Another torch is seen rising behind them. Shukra speaks slowly*) Shanta, — gone. (*Pause again, looking into the starry heavens*) THIS is the Judgment of Indra!

CURTAIN

THE BEGGAR AND THE KING

WINTHROP PARKHURST

Winthrop Parkhurst was born in New York City and educated in the local schools. He is a descendant on his mother's side of John Huss, the Bohemian reformer and martyr, and on his father's side of the executioner of Charles I of England. He is a musician of no small accomplishments. His writings include "Maracca", a Biblical play, and several short satirical sketches, of which "The Beggar and the King" is the best example.

THE BEGGAR AND THE KING

A PLAY

By WINTHROP PARKHURST

Characters

THE KING OF A GREAT COUNTRY
HIS SERVANT
A BEGGAR

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THE BEGGAR AND THE KING

A chamber in the palace overlooks a courtyard. The season is midsummer. The windows of the palace are open, and from a distance there comes the sound of a man's voice crying for bread. The King sits in a golden chair. A golden crown is on his head, and he holds in his hand a scepter which is also of gold. A servant stands by his side, fanning him with an enormous fan of peacock feathers.

THE BEGGAR (*outside*). Bread! Bread! Bread! Give me some bread!

THE KING (*languidly*). Who is that crying in the street for bread?

THE SERVANT (*fanning*). O king, it is a beggar.

THE KING. Why does he cry for bread?

THE SERVANT. O king, he cries for bread in order that he may fill his belly.

THE KING. I do not like the sound of his voice. It annoys me very much. Send him away.

THE SERVANT (*bowing*). O king, he *has* been sent away.

THE KING. If that is so, then why do I hear his voice?

THE SERVANT. O king, he has been sent away many times, yet each time that he is sent away he returns again, crying louder than he did before.

THE KING. He is very unwise to annoy me on such a warm day. He must be punished for his impudence. Use the lash on him.

THE SERVANT. O king, it has been done.

THE KING. Then bring out the spears.

THE SERVANT. O king, the guards have already bloodied their swords many times driving him away from the palace gates. But it is of no avail.

THE KING. Then bind him and gag him if necessary. If need be, cut out his tongue. I do not like the sound of the fellow's voice. It annoys me very much.

THE SERVANT. O king, thy orders were obeyed even yesterday.

THE KING (*frowning*). No. That cannot be. A beggar cannot cry for bread who has no tongue.

THE SERVANT. Behold he can — if he has grown another.

THE KING. What! Why, men are not given more than one tongue in a lifetime. To have more than one tongue is treason.

THE SERVANT. If it is treason to have more than one tongue, O king, then is this beggar surely guilty of treason.

THE KING (*pompously*). The punishment for treason is death. See to it that the fellow is slain. And do not fan me so languidly. I am very warm.

THE SERVANT (*fanning more rapidly*). Behold, O great and illustrious king, all thy commands were obeyed even yesterday.

THE KING. How! Do not jest with thy king.

THE SERVANT. If I jest, then there is truth in a jest. Even yesterday, O king, as I have told thee, the beggar which thou now hearest crying aloud in the street was slain by thy soldiers with a sword.

THE KING. Do ghosts eat bread? Forsooth, men who have been slain with a sword do not go about in the streets crying for a piece of bread.

THE SERVANT. Forsooth, they do if they are fashioned as this beggar.

THE KING. Why, he is but a man. Surely he cannot have more than one life in a lifetime.

THE SERVANT. Listen to a tale, O king, which happened yesterday.

THE KING. I am listening.

THE SERVANT. Thy soldiers smote this beggar for crying aloud in the streets for bread, but his wounds are already healed. They cut out his tongue, but he im-

mediately grew another. They slew him, yet he is now alive.

THE KING. Ah! that is a tale which I cannot understand at all.

THE SERVANT. O king, it may be well.

THE KING. I cannot understand what thou sayest, either.

THE SERVANT. O king, that may be well also.

THE KING. Thou art speaking now in riddles. I do not like riddles. They confuse my brain.

THE SERVANT. Behold, O king, if I speak in riddles it is because a riddle has come to pass.

[*The Beggar's voice suddenly cries out loudly.*

THE BEGGAR (*outside*). Bread! Bread! Give me some bread!

THE KING. Ah! He is crying out again. His voice seems to me louder than it was before.

THE SERVANT. Hunger is as food to the lungs, O king.

THE KING. His lungs I will wager are well fed. Ha, ha!

THE SERVANT. But alas! his stomach is quite empty.

THE KING. That is not my business.

THE SERVANT. Should I not perhaps fling him a crust from the window?

THE KING. No! To feed a beggar is always foolish. Every crumb that is given to a beggar is an evil seed from which springs another fellow like him.

THE BEGGAR (*outside*). Bread! Bread! Give me some bread!

THE SERVANT. He seems very hungry, O king.

THE KING. Yes. So I should judge.

THE SERVANT. If thou wilt not let me fling him a piece of bread thine ears must pay the debts of thy hand.

THE KING. A king can have no debts.

THE SERVANT. That is true, O king. Even so, the noise of this fellow's begging must annoy thee greatly.

THE KING. It does.

THE SERVANT. Doubtless he craves only a small crust from thy table and he would be content.

THE KING. Yea, doubtless he craves only to be a king and he would be very happy indeed.

THE SERVANT. Do not be hard, O king. Thou art ever wise and just. This fellow is exceedingly hungry. Dost thou not command me to fling him just one small crust from the window?

THE KING. My commands I have already given thee. See that the beggar is driven away.

THE SERVANT. But alas! O king, if he is driven away he will return again even as he did before.

THE KING. Then see to it that he is slain. I cannot be annoyed with the sound of his voice.

THE SERVANT. But alas! O great and illustrious king, if he is slain he will come to life again even as he did before.

THE KING. Ah! that is true. But his voice troubles me. I do not like to hear it.

THE SERVANT. His lungs are fattened with hunger. Of a truth they are quite strong.

THE KING. Well, propose a remedy to weaken them.

THE SERVANT. A remedy, O king?

[*He stops fanning.*

THE KING. That is what I said. A remedy — and do not stop fanning me. I am exceedingly warm.

THE SERVANT (*fanning vigorously*). A crust of bread, O king, dropped from yonder window — forsooth that might prove a remedy.

THE KING (*angrily*). I have said I will not give him a crust of bread. If I gave him a crust to-day he would be just as hungry again to-morrow, and my troubles would be as great as before.

THE SERVANT. That is true, O king. Thy mind is surely filled with great learning.

THE KING. Therefore, some other remedy must be found.

THE SERVANT. O king, the words of thy illustrious mouth are as very meat-balls of wisdom.

THE KING (*musing*). Now let me consider. Thou sayest he does not suffer pain —

THE SERVANT. Therefore he cannot be tortured.

THE KING. And he will not die —

THE SERVANT. Therefore it is useless to kill him.

THE KING. Now let me consider. I must think of some other way.

THE SERVANT. Perhaps a small crust of bread, O king —

THE KING. Ha! I have it. I have it. I myself will order him to stop.

THE SERVANT (*horrified*). O king!

THE KING. Send the beggar here.

THE SERVANT. O king!

THE KING. Ha! I rather fancy the fellow will stop his noise when the king commands him to. Ha, ha, ha!

THE SERVANT. O king, thou wilt not have a beggar brought into thy royal chamber!

THE KING (*pleased with his idea*). Yea. Go outside and tell this fellow that the king desires his presence.

THE SERVANT. O great and illustrious king, thou wilt surely not do this thing. Thou wilt surely not soil thy royal eyes by looking on such a filthy creature. Thou wilt surely not contaminate thy lips by speaking to a common beggar who cries aloud in the streets for bread.

THE KING. My ears have been soiled too much already. Therefore go now and do as I have commanded thee.

THE SERVANT. O great and illustrious king, thou wilt surely not —

THE KING (*roaring at him*). I said, Go! (*The servant, abashed, goes out*) Forsooth, I fancy the fellow will stop his bawling when I order him to. Forsooth, I fancy he will be pretty well frightened when he hears that the king desires his presence. Ha, ha, ha, ha!

THE SERVANT (*returning*). O king, here is the beggar.

[*A shambling creature hung in filthy rags follows the servant slowly into the royal chamber.*

THE KING. Ha! A magnificent sight, to be sure. Art thou the beggar who has been crying aloud in the streets for bread?

THE BEGGAR (*in a faint voice, after a slight pause*). Art thou the king?

THE KING. I am the king.

THE SERVANT (*aside to the beggar*). It is not proper for a beggar to ask a question of a king. Speak only as thou art spoken to.

THE KING (*to the servant*). Do thou likewise. (*To the beggar*) I have ordered thee here to speak to thee concerning a very grave matter. Thou art the beggar, I understand, who often cries aloud in the streets for bread. Now, the complaint of thy voice annoys me greatly. Therefore, do not beg any more.

THE BEGGAR (*faintly*). I — I do not understand.

THE KING. I said, do not beg any more.

THE BEGGAR. I — I do not understand.

THE SERVANT (*aside to the beggar*). The king has commanded thee not to beg for bread any more. The noise of thy voice is as garbage in his ears.

THE KING (*to the servant*). Ha! An excellent flower of speech. Pin it in thy buttonhole. (*To the beggar*) Thine ears, I see, are in need of a bath even more than thy body. I said, *Do not beg any more.*

THE BEGGAR. I — I do not understand.

THE KING (*making a trumpet of his hands and shouting*). *DO NOT BEG ANY MORE!*

THE BEGGAR. I — I do not understand.

THE KING. Heavens! He is deafer than a stone wall.

THE SERVANT. O king, he cannot be deaf, for he understood me quite easily when I spoke to him in the street.

THE KING (*to the beggar*). Art thou deaf? Canst thou hear what I am saying to thee now?

THE BEGGAR. Alas! I can hear every word perfectly.

THE KING. Fft! The impudence. Thy tongue shall be cut out for this.

THE SERVANT. O king, to cut out his tongue is useless, for he will grow another.

THE KING. No matter. It shall be cut out anyway. (*To the*

beggar) I have ordered thee not to beg any more in the streets. What meanest thou by saying thou dost not understand?

THE BEGGAR. The words of thy mouth I can hear perfectly. But their noise is only a foolish tinkling in my ears.

THE KING. Fft! Only a —! A lash will tinkle thy hide for thee if thou dost not cure thy tongue of impudence. I, thy king, have ordered thee not to beg any more in the streets for bread. Signify, therefore, that thou wilt obey the orders of thy king by quickly touching thy forehead thrice to the floor.

THE BEGGAR. That is impossible.

THE SERVANT (*aside to the beggar*). Come. It is not safe to tempt the patience of the king too long. His patience is truly great, but he loses it most wondrous quickly.

THE KING. Come, now: I have ordered thee to touch thy forehead to the floor.

THE SERVANT (*nudging him*). And quickly.

THE BEGGAR. Wherefore should I touch my forehead to the floor?

THE KING. In order to seal thy promise to thy king.

THE BEGGAR. But I have made no promise. Neither have I any king.

THE KING. Ho! He has made no promise. Neither has he any king. Ha, ha, ha. I have commanded thee not to beg any more, for the sound of thy voice is grievous unto my ears. Touch thy forehead now to the floor, as I have commanded thee, and thou shalt go from this palace a free man. Refuse, and thou wilt be sorry before an hour that thy father ever came within twenty paces of thy mother.

THE BEGGAR. I have ever lamented that he did. For to be born into this world a beggar is a more unhappy thing than any that I know — unless it is to be born a king.

THE KING. Fft! Thy tongue of a truth is too lively for thy health. Come, now, touch thy forehead thrice to the floor and promise solemnly that thou wilt never beg in the streets again. And hurry!

THE SERVANT (*aside*). It is wise to do as thy king commands thee. His patience is near an end.

THE KING. Do not be afraid to soil the floor with thy forehead. I will graciously forgive thee for that.

[*The beggar stands motionless.*

THE SERVANT. I said, it is not wise to keep the king waiting.

[*The beggar does not move.*

THE KING. Well? (*A pause*) *Well?* (*In a rage*) *WELL?*

THE BEGGAR. O king, thou hast commanded me not to beg in the streets for bread, for the noise of my voice offends thee. Now therefore do I likewise command thee to remove thy crown from thy forehead and throw it from yonder window into the street. For when thou hast thrown thy crown into the street, then will I no longer be obliged to beg.

THE KING. Fft! *Thou* commandest *me! Thou*, a beggar from the streets, commandest *me*, a king, to remove my crown from my forehead and throw it from yonder window into the street!

THE BEGGAR. That is what I said.

THE KING. Why, dost thou not know I can have thee slain for such words?

THE BEGGAR. No. Thou canst not have me slain. The spears of thy soldiers are as straws against my body.

THE KING. Ha! We shall see if they are. We shall see!

THE SERVANT. O king, it is indeed true. It is even as he has told thee.

THE BEGGAR. I have required thee to remove thy crown from thy forehead. If so be thou wilt throw it from yonder window into the street, my voice will cease to annoy thee any more. But if thou refuse, then thou wilt wish thou hadst never had any crown at all. For thy days will be filled with a terrible boding and thy nights will be full of horrors, even as a ship is full of rats.

THE KING. Why, this is insolence. This is treason!

THE BEGGAR. Wilt thou throw thy crown from yonder window?

THE KING. Why, this is high treason!

THE BEGGAR. I ask thee, wilt thou throw thy crown from yonder window?

THE SERVANT (*aside to the king*). Perhaps it were wise to humor him, O king. After thou hast thrown thy crown away I can go outside and bring it to thee again.

THE BEGGAR. Well? Well? (*He points to the window*) Well?

THE KING. No! I will not throw my crown from that window — no, nor from any other window. What! Shall I obey the orders of a beggar? Never!

THE BEGGAR (*preparing to leave*). Truly, that is spoken like a king. Thou art a king, so thou wouldst prefer to lose thy head than that silly circle of gold that so foolishly sits upon it. But it is well. Thou art a king. Thou couldst not prefer otherwise.

[*He walks calmly toward the door.*

THE KING (*to the servant*). Stop him! Seize him! Does he think to get off so easily with his impudence?

THE BEGGAR (*coolly*). One of thy servants cannot stop me. Neither can ten thousand of them do me any harm. I am stronger than a mountain. I am stronger than the sea!

THE KING. Ha! We will see about that, we will see about that. (*To the servant*) Hold him, I say. Call the guards. He shall be put in chains.

THE BEGGAR. My strength is greater than a mountain and my words are more fearful than a hurricane. This servant of thine cannot even touch me. With one breath of my mouth I can blow over this whole palace.

THE KING. Dost thou hear the impudence he is offering me? Why dost thou not seize him? What is the matter with thee? Why dost thou not call the guards?

THE BEGGAR. I will not harm thee now. I will only cry aloud in the streets for bread wherewith to fill my belly. But one day I will not be so kind to thee. On that day my mouth will be filled with a rushing wind and my arms will become as strong as steel rods, and I will blow over this palace, and all the bones in thy foolish body I will snap

between my fingers. I will beat upon a large drum and thy head will be my drumstick. I will not do these things now. But one day I will do them. Therefore, when my voice sounds again in thine ears, begging for bread, remember what I have told thee. Remember, O king, and be afraid!

[*He walks out. The servant, struck dumb, stares after him. The king sits in his chair, dazed.*

THE KING (*suddenly collecting his wits*). After him! After him! He must not be allowed to escape! After him!

THE SERVANT (*faltering*). O king — I cannot seem to move.

THE KING. Quick, then. Call the guards. He must be caught and put in chains. Quick, I say. Call the guards!

THE SERVANT. O king — I cannot seem to call them.

THE KING. How! Art thou dumb? Ah!

[*The beggar's voice is heard outside.*

THE BEGGAR. Bread! Bread! Give me some bread!

THE KING. Ah. (*He turns toward the window, half-frightened, and then, almost instinctively, raises his hands toward his crown, and seems on the point of tossing it out the window. But with an oath he replaces it and presses it firmly on his head*) How! Am I afraid of a beggar!

THE BEGGAR (*continuing outside*). Bread! Bread! Give me some bread!

THE KING (*with terrible anger*). Close that window!

[*The servant stands stupent, and the voice of the beggar grows louder as the curtain falls.*]

JUST TWO MEN

EUGENE PILLOT

Eugene Pillot was born in Houston, Texas, and studied at the Culver Military Academy, the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts, the University of Texas, and at Cornell and Harvard Universities.

His plays have a remarkable vogue in little theatres. The best known of these are "Hunger" (included in "Representative One-Act Plays by American Authors") and "My Lady Dreams" (included in "A Treasury of Plays for Women"). "Just Two Men" is in a new vein.

JUST TWO MEN

A PLAY

By EUGENE PILLOT

Characters

JOSÉ, a small man, a Spanish type, olive-skinned, black hair, flashing black eyes, and very young.

AXEL, a giant Viking, a Dane whose eyes are blue-green as fifty fathoms and have a remote wistful gaze, as though he could look back into ancient long-gone days. His hair is the copper-gold of the Incas, the red cargoes of the Spanish galleons, and it glows like an incandescent globe when the wind blows through it.

Both men are naked to the waist, barefooted, and wear only dirty old trousers, held together with some sort of belt.

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Applications for permission to produce "Just Two Men" should be addressed to Norman Lee Swartout, Summit, N. J. No performance may be given without his consent.

JUST TWO MEN

SCENE. *The scene is the bow of a coastwise freighter, digging her way through the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The background shows a night sky; the foreground a stretch of dark water alongside the boat. The tip of the bow is at right; at left we see part of a small cabin, with a door and a tiny window. A light shines through the window, revealing Axel sitting on the boat railing at center, his bare feet dangling in the water. José hangs over the bow, peering into the water ahead. The stillness of the night is broken by the ship's bell striking the hour.*

AXEL (*brooding*). Two bells! And still dat damn scoundrel of a thief ain't showed his hand.

JOSÉ (*lightly tosses the words over his shoulder, as he remains intent on what he is watching in the water*). No, he hasn't, has he?

AXEL. Two whole days now, José, ve been livin' in der company of a thief; and still ve don't know vich von of der lyin' blighters among us he is. Such a condition is a hell of a discomfort ter a feller dat's got ideas of right and wrong, like I got.

JOSÉ. Well, Axel, worrying about it won't help you to find the guy.

AXEL. Not vorry? Say, you sure are an inexperienced 'un. Now how under heaven are you goin' ter stop your brain from vorryin', vhen der blame ting vants ter vorry?

JOSÉ. I don't know.

AXEL. Huh, thought as much. Anyhow, dat feller should be sent ter der pen fer life fer a thievery like dat. Nothin' less fer him, der bloody scoundrel. I'd be right villin' ter give a good hunk out o' my next pay day — jest ter lay hands on him long enough ter turn him over ter der Captain!

JOSÉ. What makes you so certain that the crook's on this boat?

AXEL. Can't be novhere else.

JOSÉ. Oh, I don't know about that.

AXEL. Vell, I do. Ve didn't dock at Tampico account o' der yellow fever ashore dere. So not er bloomin' soul has come on dis boat dat vasn't on it vhen ve started out. Even der man dat brought der mail didn't leave his boat fer a minute. He jest handed der mail-bag ter der stewart, den beat it back ter shore. I saw him go myself. And if you recollec' — der mail had hardly been handed round, vhen der thievery happened. Dat's vhy I'm certain as I'm sittin' here — der feller dat did der dirty vork must be right on dis here boat.

JOSÉ. Kind of strange how it happened though, wasn't it?

AXEL. Pretty blame queer, I calls it. Dere der Captain had two piles of greenbacks — money dat'd jest come in der mail — layin' in two piles on his desk in der cabin dere. He steps into der next room ter give some order ter der stewart — and vhen he comes back — holy smoke! Von pile of money is gone, nobody knows vhere! And der deck o' der boat as clean as der palm o' your hand. *Nobody* about.

JOSÉ. That's a fact.

AXEL. And dat von hundred dollar revard der Captain offers ter der man dat brings der thief ter light — still goes a-beggin' — fer somebody ter gobble it. I vish ter hell I knew who it vas. I'd make quick vork of der blac'guard, lemme tell you, by golly I vould!

JOSÉ. Maybe — it wasn't anybody that took the money.

AXEL (*darkly*). Vhat you mean?

JOSÉ. Those bills might have blown out through the window.

AXEL. Out der vindow? Huh, not so's you could notice it. Anyhow, it's pretty blame funny der odder pile o' money managed ter stay stuck ter der desk. No, sir, some feller in der crew on dis here tugboat is guilty o' thievin'. I

ain't slept fer two nights, cause o' realizin' dat. Drives me crazy, havin' suspicion hangin' over me.

JOSÉ. But you proved a satisfactory alibi.

AXEL. Sure I did. But so did all der rest o' der gang. Alibi or no alibi, I can't stand havin' der Captain tink it *might* be me, every time he lays his eyes on me. Vhy, it makes a feller feel guilty, jest ter have him look at you. And der rest o' der crew feel der same vay. Till der guilty man is found — ve're all guilty, every last livin' von of us.

JOSÉ. Still if one's conscience is clear —

AXEL (*flaring*). In all my born days I ain't never seen such a lad as you! Even vhen a thief is ter be caught, you don't seem ter be bothered von bit.

JOSÉ (*lightly, as usual*). Aw, what's the use of being bothered? It's much more fun to watch these porpoise rush ahead of the bow. There are five, no, *six*, running abreast now! Just like chariot horses! Really they are, Axel! You just ought to see them. They make great plunges with such quick flirts of the fins. Oh, look, they're leaping clear of the water; *look!*

AXEL (*sternly*). José, stop vatchin' dem fish vash demselves.

JOSÉ. What for?

AXEL. I vant you ter come sit down by me.

JOSÉ. Oh, no.

AXEL. Yes. I'm lonesome. I vant ter talk ter somebody — close by.

JOSÉ. Well. (*Reluctantly, José leaves his post and sits on the railing beside Axel. But he can't resist glancing back toward the bow and saying boyishly*) But you ought to have seen them leaping, Axel, really you ought!

AXEL. I vasn't born yesterday. I know how a fish jumps. But dere's von ting I don't know.

JOSÉ. What?

AXEL (*firmly*). Vhy did you come ter sea, José?

JOSÉ. Why I — I just decided to come.

AXEL. Dat's no reason.

JOSÉ (*suspicious*). Why do you want to know?

AXEL. Jest curiosity, perhaps.

JOSÉ. You don't ask it like — curiosity.

AXEL. Oh, vell, der reason a feller does von ting sometimes gives an inklin' ter vhy he does somethin' else.

JOSÉ. What are you driving at?

AXEL. Did *you* steal der Captain's money?

JOSÉ. Why, *Axel!*

AXEL. Did you? I vant ter know.

JOSÉ. The idea! Why do you ask *me* such a question?

AXEL. It don't seem ter have bothered you much, dat's all.

JOSÉ. Oh, nothing bothers me much, Axel. To me life is — a song! Besides, I've never been to sea before and I haven't gotten over the wonder of it yet. When this old freighter noses her way through the swells of the sea, twisting smoothly as a pretty dancing girl, I forget everything else. The other salts aboard are old-timers like you, and have sailed the seas so much that to them it's just water. But to me it's a strange, magic thing. And the fogs above it are like a veil from heaven. It's all so wonderful and so —

AXEL (*interrupts, tartly*). You ain't told me *vhy* you came ter sea.

JOSÉ. I tell you I didn't steal that money!

AXEL. I don't recollec' sayin' you did.

JOSÉ. Then why do you keep suspecting me?

AXEL. Didn't I tell you every bloomin' von of us is suspected till der scoundrel is caught?

JOSÉ. Well, you seem more anxious than the rest to find the fellow who did it. You may just be trying to save your own hide. Maybe *you* stole that money!

AXEL (*darkly*). Look out vhat you sayin'.

JOSÉ. It's just as likely that it should be you as me.

AXEL. Do I have der looks of a thief?

JOSÉ. No, but I don't either.

AXEL. Den let's stop der investigatin'.

JOSÉ. I'm willing.

AXEL. But if you don't mind — I really vould like ter know vhy you came ter sea?

JOSÉ. I'm — not telling.

AXEL. It's only 'cause I'm interested in you, dat's all.

JOSÉ. Sure — ?

AXEL. Course.

JOSÉ. Well, if you must know — it was because of my — mother.

AXEL (*gaily*). Aye, lad, it's usually a voman dat's responsible fer a man's goin' adventurin'. Dey is queer tings, vomen is. Vhen dey vants you most, dey're villin' not ter have you. But it's not like mudders ter ship off lads so young as you?

JOSÉ. Oh, she didn't ship me off! We love each other too much for that.

AXEL (*the persistent one*). Den vhy'd you leave her?

JOSÉ. Because — she is — dying —

AXEL. Aw, no!

JOSÉ (*bursts forth*). *Yes!* Dying of the white sickness — consumption they call it. Year after year fading away like a beautiful rose, — oh, *Madonna!*

AXEL. Poor lad.

JOSÉ. And the paler she grows, the more like an angel she becomes. Why, sometimes — there even seems to be a halo of light about her. Oh, I love her so, and cannot be near her —

AXEL (*very kindly*). Vhy can't you now?

JOSÉ. There are just the two of us; and we are very poor. I can send her more money working on a boat like this than any job I could get on land. That's why I'm at sea, Axel. And it's why I'm gay all the time — to try to forget that I'm really so sad — *inside.*

AXEL. I'm real sorry for you.

JOSÉ. I'm always so afraid — before I get back to her — she will be gone!

AXEL. Now o' course she'd never do nothin' like dat.

JOSÉ (*wistfully*). I don't know. She may slip away sometime in the night, not meaning to, of course.

AXEL. Let's ferget 'bout dat fer a while. Jest ter give us somethin' else ter tink about — vhat you say — if I tell you vhy it vas dat I first took ter der sea?

JOSÉ. Was it a woman too — with you?

AXEL (*seriously*). Aye, lad, a voman in old New Orleans — der only von I ever had in my life. But she *vas* a voman, lad, with her broad, calm brow underneath hair rich as der lightnin' dat flies in der skies. And her eyes set a-slant — glowed like beacons dat light der river down ter der sea. And it vas along der old Mississippi dat ve two used ter vander, sometimes all day long — in der sprintime of der vorld. Ah, till you've had a springtime in der South, you've never tasted spring at all, lad. Jassimens an' honeysuckle an' roses aburstin' der hearts out in bloom everyvhere. Vell, it vas dat spring dat put me here. Ve never know how close heaven is ter hell, I guess. I made a mess o' my life dat time. And o' hers too, God bless her. But my boy — my own little boy — I ain't never seen him. He must be sixteen by now.

JOSÉ (*gaily*). Oho, I didn't know you were a married man!

AXEL (*simply*). I'm — not.

JOSÉ (*stunned*). O-oh.

AXEL. Ve vere both young — she and I — both fools. A stupid quarrel and I beat it avay. Been vanderin' ever since — a lonely dog, from ship ter ship, from port ter port.

JOSÉ. Why don't you go back to her?

AXEL. Go back? Vell, at first I vas too proud. And now I ain't got der heart ter go back, after havin' deserted her all dese years. But I get mighty hungry sometimes ter see dem both. Hungrier den I ever get fer food.

JOSÉ. I know how you must feel. I often get hungry that way for mother. Perhaps you'd like to see her picture?

AXEL (*indifferently*). Vouldn't mind.

JOSÉ (*digs in his trousers, pulls out a wallet*). She's thinner and whiter than that picture, but her eyes are just the

same. (*Hands the picture to Axel, who rises and turns it so that the light from the cabin window falls upon it.*)

AXEL (*suddenly flaming*). *Vhere did you get dis picture?*

JOSÉ. From mother.

AXEL. Dat's a lie!

JOSÉ (*leaps to his feet, defiantly*). But I did!

AXEL. I don't believe it!

JOSÉ. But it's so! She said — playfully, of course — when she gave it to me — "I give you my eyes with a smile to take with you. Sometimes a smile helps more than anything else — the smile in my eyes" —

AXEL. My God! Der very vords she said ter me years ago — "You vill remember der smile in my eyes," she said. It is so — you are my son, José! My boy, *my boy!* [*Starts to fling his arms around José, who breaks away from him.*

JOSÉ. Wait, Axel! Are you sure?

AXEL. Do you tink I could be mistaken vhen I've seen only dose eyes fer seventeen years? My boy, I must hold you before ve talk! Come ter me!

JOSÉ. Wait! If you really are my father — you're *sure* you are?

AXEL. Course. I know it now in more'n a thousand ways. From der day you first set foot on deck, I been drawn ter you as I never been ter any odder man on earth. I often tink 'bout it. It vas so strange, I could not understand. But it's plain now. You're my own flesh an' blood, and *she* is in your eyes, in your soul!

JOSÉ (*frightened*). Then — it's not a trick you're playing on me?

AXEL. Vhy should I — ?

JOSÉ. I don't know. But if it's true — you must help me, father, help me *quick!*

AXEL. Vhat you talkin' 'bout?

JOSÉ. Look in this wallet!

AXEL (*surprised*). Vhat? (*Looks in the wallet, but does not take it*) Vhy, vhat you doin' vid so much money?

JOSÉ. Oh, don't you *understand?*

AXEL. Vhy, no.

JOSÉ. It's the — *Captain's!*

AXEL. You mean — *you?* —

JOSÉ. Yes, I —

AXEL. Aw, no? —

JOSÉ. Yes, I took it, *I!*

AXEL. No, no! Mustn't say such a ting! Vhat if somebody heard you? You didn't, course you didn't.

JOSÉ. I tell you I did!

AXEL. You're jest excited 'cause of meetin' your fadder fer der first time. But you mustn't let it get you so. Don't go talkin' vild!

JOSÉ (*sobbing*). Father — I'm — not — talking wild!

AXEL (*suddenly realizes José speaks the truth*). O-oh. But it can't be so! It mustn't! Not after I jest found you, — good God, *no!*

JOSÉ. It *is* so — and I'm scared!

AXEL. How could you do dis? How could you wid such a beautiful mudder?

JOSÉ. It was for her.

AXEL. Don't lie ter me, lad, or I shall go mad!

JOSÉ. I couldn't help it. There wasn't any other way.

AXEL (*beside himself*). V-h-a-t? Vhat you talkin' 'bout?

JOSÉ. Well, you see, a letter came from her in the mail the boat brought us at Tampico.

AXEL. Yes, yes, I recollec' der mail-boat.

JOSÉ. She wrote me what the doctor said. He's always told her the truth about herself. Now he says she's growing weaker. The spring has taken so much out of her, she can't last till fall — unless she goes to the mountains where it is high and dry. I would have stolen a dozen times to give her a chance to go there. She must be saved!

AXEL. Course.

JOSÉ. Oh, I didn't intend to steal the money. I've never done such a thing before in all my life. Honest I haven't! You must believe that — please.

AXEL (*waiting*). Vell?

JOSÉ. But the chance came and it seemed the only way to get the money. Something inside made me do it. If only I hadn't! You don't know how the fear of being caught has nearly killed me. This — this is the way it was — I happened to be passing the Captain's door, as he stepped into the next room. I saw the money on his desk, great piles of it! Quick as a flash I grabbed it, slipped down a railing to below and into my bunk without a single soul seeing me. I thought I was in luck. I hid the money under a loose board in the floor, but I was afraid to leave it there. I didn't know *what* to do with it! Of course, I was going to mail it to her at the next port we touched, but when I heard them say at mess that every man and every piece of mail would be searched before the boat docked, I got scared. All I could do was to carry it around with me and just be gay, as though I didn't know anything. But now you can tell me what to do, father. *What shall I do?*

AXEL (*broken-hearted*). My poor boy.

JOSÉ. We must do something! Mother's *got* to have the money! And I don't know how to get it to her. Tell me what to do, please tell me, father.

AXEL. Vait, let me tink.

JOSÉ. I'm sorry I did it.

AXEL. I know, I know.

JOSÉ. But I couldn't help it, really.

AXEL. *Stop talkin'!* How can I tink, vhen you keep talkin' like a phonygraph? Hard enough ter tink anyhow. And now — oh, vhat shall I do? Good God in heaven, show me der vay, von't You? I can't lose dem now, vhen I jest found dem — after all der veary years I been eatin' my heart out in longin' ter lay my eyes on dem. And I can't take dem wid der stain of thievery on der heads. You know I can't. Vhat shall I do? Oh, vhy do You give back my joys only ter snatch dem avay? God, Fadder of All, listen ter me, I'm prayin' ter You, listen. On all der seas

I ever sailed, I've had faith in Your might; yes, I have! You might not have known it, but I have. In sunshine and in storm I alvays knew You'd never fail me, so long as my heart vas stout. Oh, help me now, Fadder God, ter save dis lad who's done dis terrible ting, *help me!*

JOSÉ (*childishly*). You wouldn't blame me, if you were in my place.

AXEL. In — your — place? (*Comes to a sudden decision*) Yes, dat's der ting, course! Give me dat money, give it ter me quick.

[*Jerks the wallet from José.*

JOSÉ. What are you going to do?

AXEL. I'm der von dat stole dis money; and you're goin' ter turn me over ter der Captain!

JOSÉ. Oh, no.

AXEL. Listen here. Dere's a revard of von hundred dollars ter any man dat finds der thief. You can send dat ter your mudder. And I've a month's pay I ain't never had a chance ter spend. I'll get dat ter you somehow. Dat'll take care of her in der mountains till fall. And listen here — you may get a promotion by squealin' on me ter der Captain. Dat'll mean more money.

JOSÉ. I couldn't ever do that.

AXEL. You gotter.

JOSÉ. No! I'll give myself up!

[*Starts toward the cabin, but Axel holds him back.*

AXEL. You von't!

JOSÉ (*tries to break away from Axel*). I will, I will, *I will!*

AXEL (*shaking him, angrily*). Don't be a blame fool!

JOSÉ. What would mother say, if I did what you want?

AXEL. She vill never know, you hear? Svear it — she vill never know!

JOSÉ (*hesitant*). I — I —

AXEL (*thunders*). Go on!

JOSÉ. I — I *can't!*

AXEL. You gotter!

JOSÉ. How can I swear to such a thing?

AXEL. *Svear it!*

JOSÉ. Please —

AXEL. *Go on — svear it!*

JOSÉ. I — swear — it —

AXEL (*with a great effort*). Now knock at der Captain's door dere — and tell him — you caught me wid der goods. Go on.

[*José starts with dragging feet toward the cabin, suddenly wheels around, rushes to his father, and clings to him.*

JOSÉ. No, Father! I want *you!* I can't give you away!

AXEL. Do as I say, lad.

JOSÉ. And mother — oh, mother wants you too!

AXEL. Knock at dat door.

JOSÉ (*tigerishly*). How can I go back to her, knowing that you — you whom she has always loved, will not save yourself for her somehow?

AXEL. It is because I love her so much — dat I give myself up ter save you fer her, lad.

JOSÉ (*crumples in a heap at Axel's feet*). Oh, God — Madonna, why does He treat us like this?

AXEL. God knows vhat He is 'bout. Ve don't. Stand up, José. (*José rises*) Now I vant you ter do somethin' fer me — somethin' ter give me a memory through der prison years ahead.

JOSÉ. What?

AXEL. Look at me vid your own mudder's eyes — straight at me.

JOSÉ (*looking at Axel*). Yes?

AXEL. And — kiss me.

JOSÉ. Father!

[*He flings himself on Axel and kisses him passionately.*

AXEL (*stoically, as he braces himself to his full height and forces José from him*). Now ve are no longer fadder and son, boy — jest two men, tryin' ter do vhat's right. Von of us stole. Von of us pays. Knock at dat door.

JOSÉ (*appealingly*). Father —

AXEL (*thunders*). You are a man, José!

JOSÉ. But —

AXEL (*points to the door*). *Knock!*

JOSÉ (*crushed*). Very well — Father —

[*With a supreme effort, José drags himself to the door and knocks. Axel remains standing like a giant of old, grimly awaiting the coming of his fate.*

CURTAIN

FREEDOM

JOHN REED

John Reed was born in Seattle, Washington, in 1887. He studied at Harvard University and after graduation became a special writer for the *Metropolitan Magazine.* He will be remembered for his articles on the American Punitive Expedition into Mexico and for his interviews with members of President Wilson's cabinet. He was one of the editors of the *Liberator* and while its representative to Russia died in Moscow in 1921.

His play "Moondown" was produced by the Washington Square Players, and "Freedom" and "The Peace That Passeth Understanding" were produced by the Provincetown Players.

FREEDOM

A PLAY

By JOHN REED

Characters

TRUSTY
THE POET
FIRST GUARD
THE ROMANCER
SMITH
SECOND GUARD

TIME. The present
PLACE. Sweetwater Penitentiary

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Applications for permission to present "Freedom" should be addressed to Louise Bryant Reed, in care of Frank Shay, 4 Christopher Street, New York. No performance may be given without her consent.

FREEDOM

SCENE. *The Trusty's cell in Sweetwater Penitentiary. Entrance rear center, a heavy door opening inward, upon the outside of which can be seen heavy bars and bolts, just now standing open. A window, hung with white dimity curtains, to the left; beneath it, a wooden chest, and a white enameled washstand; a cot bed, very white and virginal, to the right. In a rocking-chair, center, beside a small table on which perches a lamp, sits an elderly bent man, in prison stripes, wearing a pair of horn spectacles and reading the Bible. The Guard appears at the door, jangling a bunch of keys.*

TRUSTY. Ah, Mr. Thompson.

GUARD (*genially*). Twelve o'clock, buddy. Lights out. Midnight for you, says the warden.

TRUSTY (*closing the Bible*). "'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord." Ah, Mr. Thompson, how true that is! Look at me. Mr. Thompson — the Lord has indeed taken vengeance. And I know — I *know* "that my Redeemer liveth." He "moves in a mysterious way." — I declare to goodness he does.

GUARD (*sententiously*). Right for you. There ain't any crime without punishment. That's one thing this here penitentiary has learned *me* — It's better to live straight, then you'll be on the safe side.

TRUSTY. Ah, if *I* had only served a term as guard in a penitentiary. I think that all human beings should serve as guards in a penitentiary.

GUARD. Well, sir, it surely makes you think straight.

TRUSTY. How I respect free men. How wise they must be to know the difference between good and evil. And you, Mr. Thompson, you are not only good enough to be free, but you are chosen out of all your fellows

to guard evil men. What a good man you must be, Mr. Thompson!

GUARD (*simply, with dignity*). I have always kept within the law.

TRUSTY. The Law! Surely it must be a revelation from on high!

GUARD (*proudly*). No, sir. Man made the Law without any help from God whatever. (*Trusty looks shocked*) Not that I don't believe in religion myself — in its place. But it hasn't got no business monkeying with the Law.

TRUSTY. And yet you go to church. I see you every morning in the chapel.

GUARD. I'm hired to see that the prisoners get the proper religious influence. (*He reaches in and pulls the door almost shut*) How about the light, now?

[*Trusty rises, laying the Bible reverently on the table. At this moment a large block of stone heaves out of the wall, falling silently on the bed. A head and shoulders appear, and a hand aiming a revolver. Trusty turns around in the act of yawning, sees the gun, and stands petrified.*

GUARD (*swinging open the door again*). Well, well, what's the matter with you? (*Trusty does not answer*) Do you want me to put it out for you?

TRUSTY (*quickly*). No, no.

[*He blows out the light. Darkness.*

GUARD. I don't want to be kept waiting around here again, old hoss. Next time, light out when I say so!

[*Grumbling, he slams the door; bolts and bars can be heard falling into place.*

ROMANCER (*in the hole*). Don't move! One step, damn you, and I'll blow you so full of holes you can't hold water! Light that candle! And light it damn quick, too! Hey! Stop moving! Did you hear what I said? (*Trusty stops dead*) Look here, friend! Did you hear me tell you to light that candle?

TRUSTY. Y—yes — sir — but how —

ROMANCER (*thundering*). Don't dare move! Light that candle! Stop moving, damn you!

VOICE OF SMITH. Well, how's he going to light the light if you don't let him move?

ROMANCER (*hesitating*). That's true! (*To Trusty*) Here you. Scratch a match on the ceiling so I can see you. (*Trusty does so. The candle lighted, there emerge from the hole the Romancer, the Poet, and Smith, in the order named. The Romancer carries a bundle, which he tosses on the bed. Trusty retreats before these apparitions. Romancer sidles down front, and keeping Trusty carefully covered, hisses*) Up with your hands!

TRUSTY. What for? I haven't any weapons!

ROMANCER (*snarling*). Up with your hands, I say! (*Trusty obeys*) I know that trick, my hearty. I've half a mind to blow your head off.

SMITH (*disgusted*). Aw, like Hell you have. What, and wake up the whole prison? That would be a smart thing to do.

POET. That's a nice way to talk. Don't you see you're ruining the dramatic effect?

ROMANCER (*lowering his gun*). Yes. What's the matter with you? Ain't we desperate men? Well, then. Would we stop at anything? Give me liberty or give me —

POET (*clasping his hands*). Liberty! How I feel the wind in my hair at the sound of that name! Freedom! Liberty!

SMITH. Same thing here exactly. What I want to do is to get out!

[*Trusty has let his hands drop, and is looking at them in amazement.*

ROMANCER (*harshly*). Look here, stranger. If you don't hold up those hands I'll perforate you. (*Trusty jerkily raises his hands*) Search him, men!

[*Smith and Poet move forward.*

TRUSTY (*piteously*). Don't. You wouldn't take 'em away from me!

[*Smith extracts from his back pocket a number of magazines and examines them closely.*

SMITH (*disgustedly*). "Votes for Women!" What's this? Well, I'll be damned if it ain't a Suffragette paper!

ROMANCER. A Suffragette —

TRUSTY. O, Sir! Spare me those — spare me those! They are all I have to connect me with the outside world. My grandmother sends them to me. She is a Militant, and her name is Mrs. Pankhurst!

POET. Mrs. Pankhurst! Is she your grandmother? Fortunate being!

[*He embraces Trusty.*

ROMANCER (*exasperated*). Say! What do you guys think this is, anyway? Didn't I tell you to search that man? Why, he's had a chance to shoot us fifty times!

SMITH. Well, perhaps he did have a *chance* — but he didn't have no *gun!*

ROMANCER (*lowering his weapon*). No gun? Why, that don't seem right. Boys, there's something wrong here. In every story I ever read, the Guard had a gun or a knife, and you had to kill him to get away from him.

TRUSTY. Hold on there! I ain't a Guard. I'm Trusty. See the stripes? I'm a prisoner, too.

ROMANCER (*scratching his head, puzzled*). A prisoner! This is more unexpected. What are we going to do?

SMITH (*fuming*). Do! Stop talking and get out.

ROMANCER (*to Smith*). Oh, that's all very easy for *you* to say. But what are you going to *do* when nothing turns out like it *ought* to? How could we know there was a prisoner in this room? By George, if *you* had the responsibility of this escape, I guess you wouldn't talk so big.

SMITH (*sneering*). I guess *that's* right!

ROMANCER (*menacing*). What's that?

SMITH. Nothing.

TRUSTY (*eagerly*). Are you escaping?

SMITH (*with sarcasm*). Naw! We're going out and kiss the Warden good night!

[*Romancer glares at Smith.*

POET (*angrily*). I have never escaped with such a common person in my life!

ROMANCER. The plot has been hatching for six months. Didn't you hear us rapping on the wall?

TRUSTY. So *that's* what it was! (*Chattily*) Do you know, I thought it was the rats — and I just can't *bear* rats or mice — so I says to the keeper, I says, only yesterday — no, I guess it must 'a' been the day before — well, anyway, I was talking to him just like I'm talking to you. He was standing about here, near the door, and I was sitting on that chair over there — dear, dear, how it all comes back to me — and I says, all of a sudden — just like that — "Mr. Thompson," I says, "rats and mice is a thing I can't stand for." I says, "You just got to get me some rat-poison," I says —

SMITH (*bursting out*). Say, do you know what time it is? Do you know it's after midnight? It's going to get light pretty soon!

[*Poet goes to the window and pulls aside the curtain.*

ROMANCER (*with satisfaction*). Just the right time. They *always* escape just before dawn —

POET. The Dawn! "Now up the Eastern sky creep Day's rosy fingers" —

SMITH. Old Stuff! Old stuff. I've heard that before! Plagiarizing, hey?

POET (*coldly*). Not so. Quoting, sir, quoting!

TRUSTY (*holding out his clasped hands to Romancer*). For eighteen years I have dreamed of this moment. Let me go with you! Ain't it funny! Why, I only want to say — I was thinking to myself, I was, right in this very room: "If I ever get a chance to escape —" I thought —

ROMANCER. Enough! (*He meditates, frowning*) Hum. Not so bad, perhaps. True, we must leave no witnesses behind. I had thought of strangling you — but maybe it can be arranged. Look here, old man. Have you the courage to dare greatly?

TRUSTY (*respectfully*). Yes, sir.

POET. Does your impetuous soul chafe at prison bars?

TRUSTY. Yes, sir.

ROMANCER. Do you want to breathe God's free air, before you die?

TRUSTY. Well, for Heaven's sake! If that isn't the very remark I made to the Warden, the other morning when —

ROMANCER. Never mind! Is that a Bible? Place your left hand on the Bible —

SMITH. Aw, he's too old. He'll bug the deal!

ROMANCER. Place your left hand on the Bible and repeat after me —

POET. I beg your pardon. Repeat after *me!*

ROMANCER. How do you mean, repeat after you? Am I, or am I not, the commanding officer of this escape?

POET. That's got nothing to do with it. If you will remember, Smith here refused to swear to your oath, so *I* had to swear him.

SMITH (*sourly*). It wasn't because I liked yours any better, Alcibiades. But I had to do something or else we'd 'a' been back in that cell yet. (*To Trusty*) And I advise you to do the same, grandpa, if you want to move out of here before noon.

ROMANCER. You see! It was not your oath at all!

POET. (*to Smith — furiously*) I never heard of such low-down ingratitude in my life! I saved you from swearing to the most humiliating conditions and you abandon me thus! This is what happens when a noble mind encounters a base one!

SMITH (*hurriedly*). Why don't you swear him together?

POET (*taken aback*). Together?

ROMANCER (*eagerly*). Yes. Why not?

POET. Why, I don't know. Why didn't we think of that before?

[*He shakes hands with the Romancer.*

ROMANCER (*to Trusty*). Place your left hand on the Bible and repeat after *us* —

POET. I swear upon this Holy Book to be faithful unto death —

ROMANCER. I swear that neither poison, torture, nor the knife shall make me reveal —

TRUSTY (*brightly*). What was that now, again? I didn't catch —

POET. Look here! That's a rotten trick! You've gone and made yours five words longer —

ROMANCER. You're a nice one to talk! You've changed the whole oath —

SMITH (*to Trusty*). Swear! For God's sake, swear to anything!

TRUSTY (*loudly*). I swear! I swear! I swear!

POET (*suspiciously*). Do you understand the oath?

TRUSTY. Perfectly. Funny thing, but that reminds me of a —

ROMANCER (*nervously*). Say no more. We'll believe you! To business! We have no time to lose.

SMITH. Now you're *talking*. (*To Trusty*) Here you. Got anything you want to take along?

[*Trusty begins to scurry around, opening his chest and making a little bundle of the contents.*

POET (*clasping his head and coming down*). One moment! A pencil! A piece of paper! Quick! I must have a pencil!

TRUSTY (*doubtfully*). A pencil?

ROMANCER. You can't have a pencil! You've got to prick your finger and write in your heart's blood!

SMITH. What in hell do you want with a pencil?

POET (*exalted*). I have a flash. An inspiration. I must write at once. Do you know how a prisoner walks the floor of his cell in the night-time, to and fro, to and fro, like a caged animal? I shall write a great poem about it!

TRUSTY. I'm sorry I haven't a pencil. But here's my fountain pen.

[*He produces it.*

ROMANCER (*shuddering*). Fountain pen! Ugh! How sordid!

POET (*taking fountain pen. Scurrying around the room*). Paper! Paper! (*His eye lights on the Bible*) Ah! This will do!

[*He sits.*

TRUSTY. So you're a poet, hey? Well, well, well —

POET (*with dignity*). Do you mean to say you have never heard of Jenkins, the Prison Poet? I — I am he! My verses have appeared in all the magazines. It has been said that not since Oscar Wilde has any one written so touchingly of freedom. That's my line, you know — Freedom, Liberty, The Man in the Cage, the Iron entering into the Soul. I have an immense Public — mostly feminine — waiting for me out yonder! (*Waving his arm*) They are getting up a petition for my pardon now.

SMITH. Why?

POET (*complacently*). Why, because I am a poet.

SMITH. You need that pardon, buddy. I don't grudge you a word of it.

TRUSTY (*to poet*). What did you get in for?

SMITH. Indecent exposure.

POET (*rising; furious*). I want to say right here that I will not escape one step farther with this person until he apologizes to me publicly!

TRUSTY (*genially*). By George! Ye know *I* call that pretty bright, I do —

POET. Bright with the loathsome phosphorescence of putrescence! Adroit as the slimy members of a specimen of saurian reptile! Agile as the senile, blue-bottomed gibbon gibbering ineptly to his idiotic mate! If I possessed handy to my tongue the multi-syllabled, particolored, blasting epithets to build your philippic, you'd fold your toga around your leprous physique, and sit down like Marius amid the ruins of Carthage —

SMITH (*timidly*). Hold on, governor! You win! I don't know whether you're insulting me or not but I take back everything I said!

POET (*glaring around*). Has anybody else got any criticism?

(*Silence*) Then I presume I'm to be allowed to complete this work in peace!

[*He sits down again to the Bible.*

ROMANCER (*hesitating*). I don't seem to remember any precedent for this!

POET (*writing madly. In a singsong voice*). Lord Byron —

TRUSTY. I don't remember anything about Lord Byron doing *this* —

POET. He did n't. But he might have —

TRUSTY (*bursting into wild, senile laughter, and slapping his knee*). He! He! O Lord! He! He! O! "But he might have!" O Lord! He! He! If that ain't the funniest! —

ROMANCER (*flourishing his gun*). Damn you! Will you shut up? (*Trusty suddenly obeys*) For three cents I'd drill you full of lead!

SMITH. Look here! You guys make me sick! Do you want to get out of here, or *don't* you?

ROMANCER (*severely*). We want to do it right, or not at all! If we can't do the thing properly, we won't do it. We're going to escape from here like gentlemen, or else we're not going to escape!

TRUSTY. That's right! A convict is known by the company he keeps!

POET (*writing*). Art for Art's sake!

SMITH. This is no place for a low-brow that just wants to get out!

[*Trusty is searching busily about his washstand.*

ROMANCER (*impatiently*). Oh, come on, you fellows! I'm tired of waiting around here!

SMITH. You took the words right out of my mouth!

POET. One more couplet, and I'll be with you — Somebody give me a rhyme for "prison" — "missen" — "bedizen" — "arisen" —

TRUSTY (*suddenly*). My God! I can't go with you!

ALL. Can't go?

TRUSTY (*miserably*). I can't find my toothbrush!

SMITH. Your *what?*

TRUSTY. Yes, you know I'm perfectly at *sea* without my toothbrush. Night and morning I use it — I don't think I've spent a night without it since my mother —

SMITH. Well, what in hell are you going to do with a toothbrush?

POET (*with sarcasm*). He's going to wear it for a collar, of course.

SMITH (*bitterly*). Little casino for you, Bertie!

ROMANCER (*magnificently, to Trusty*). Never mind, old man, you can use mine!

SMITH. There! That's what I call handsome!

TRUSTY. But I — but I —

ROMANCER. Not a word! —

POET (*leaping up*). Eureka! It is finished!

SMITH. *What's* finished?

ROMANCER (*pleased*). Read it! Read it!

SMITH (*furiously*). Say, do you fellows know what time it is?

ALL (*holding up their hands impressively*). S-s-sshh!

POET (*clearing his throat and srtiking an attitude*). Ahem! Ahem! It's very rough, of course. I really didn't have time to polish it. But under the circumstances I consider it pretty passionate. It is an imitation of Tom Osborne's imitation of Julian Hawthorne's imitation of Giovanitti; it is entitled "The Pacer."

THE PACER

Up and down; up and down; up and down
Paces the Man — in the middle of the night —
What is he thinking of? How should I know?
Listen! I will tell you!
He is thinking of getting out!
Is it not strange that he is thinking of getting out?
It is, for he is in for bigamy!
Up and down; up and down; up and down —
[*Smith, who has been listening with amazement and disgust, goes swiftly across to the bed.*

ROMANCER. Hey! Where are you going?

SMITH (*in a choked voice*). I'm going back to my cell.

POET. I never heard of anything so rude!

ROMANCER. You mean you're not going with us? Why, Great Heavens, man —!

SMITH (*standing on the bed*). The judge sentenced me to five years; but he never said I had to listen to that stuff.

[*He begins to climb through the hole. Romancer and Trusty run and pull him back by the legs.*

ROMANCER. You mustn't leave us now. It will spoil everything. I swear to you it won't happen again.

SMITH (*coming down*). Very well, if you'll choke off that human siphon —

POET (*much offended*). *That's* what's the matter with American art!

SMITH. That's *just* what's the matter with it!

ROMANCER (*mopping his brow*). This is very puzzling. Somehow it doesn't seem appropriate. I never heard of desperate men arguing about Art.

SMITH. I never heard of anybody *but* desperate men arguing about Art.

ROMANCER. All you talkers make me sick! I'm a man of action, I am! I'm going out that window. (*Points*) Anybody that wants can follow.

[*He goes toward the bed and returns down front with his bundle, which he opens.*

SMITH. Action at last!

TRUSTY (*coming down*). What's all that?

ROMANCER (*busy, crisply*). That, my fine fellow, is the means of getting us all out of here. This is a file —

POET. A file!

TRUSTY. A *file!*

ROMANCER (*complacently*). You think this is a strange looking file. It doesn't look to you like any file you ever saw before. (*Impressively*) Gentlemen, you will be amazed when I tell you that I made this file out of a table knife, secretly in my cell, by grinding the edge of the knife against my teeth. It took me three years.

TRUSTY. Yes, but what are you going to do with it?

POET (*severely*). Don't interrupt! Can't you see he's talking?

ROMANCER (*slowly drawing a bundle of rags from bundle*). And this is — what do you imagine? It is a rope ladder. For three years these little pieces of cloth have been smuggled to me baked in pies. Unfortunately I inadvertently ate several pieces, so that the ladder is rather short.

[*He unfolds ladder, which is about four feet in length.*

TRUSTY (*who has grown more and more bewildered*). But what is it for?

ROMANCER. After we have filed away the window bars —

SMITH (*at the window*). Ho! ho! Ha! Ha!

POET. Will you hush up?

SMITH. Three years! O Lord!

ROMANCER (*glaring*). After we have filed away the bars on that window, I say, we shall let ourselves down outside on this rope ladder, shoot the sentry on the wall —

TRUSTY. But there *ain't* any sentry on the wall —

ROMANCER (*startled*). What?

TRUSTY. *There ain't any wall!*

POET. What do you mean?

TRUSTY. All you got to do when you get out that window is walk away. I'm Trusty, see? They don't nobody guard *me*. Dear, dear! It wasn't a week ago that I was saying to the Guard —

POET. Do you mean to say that all we've got to do after we get out of that window is walk away?

ROMANCER (*hoarsely*). There isn't any wall to drop down? There isn't any sentry to kill?

TRUSTY (*uneasily*). Yessir! Nosir!

SMITH. Hooray! It's a cinch! Let's be on our way.

ROMANCER. Cinch! It's an outrage, that's what it is! Here I've been working and scheming and plotting for three years, smuggling in a rope ladder with patient, painful toil; bribing a guard to get me a revolver with my

last penny. And all in vain. Three long, unhappy years all, all come to nothing!

POET. Yes, but we want to get out, don't we?

ROMANCER. There is something in what you say, I suppose. You must not mind me. I shall recover in a little while. But I needn't say that I am bitterly, bitterly disappointed.

SMITH (*impatiently*). Let's get along. It's getting light already —

POET (*slapping Romancer on back*). Come, brace up, old man. I know just how you feel.

[*They move across the room toward window. Trusty, however, remains behind, wringing his hands.*

SMITH. Get a hustle on, grandpa!

TRUSTY (*hesitating*). I — I've been thinking —

SMITH. That won't do you any harm.

TRUSTY. I think — perhaps — I'd better not go, after all —

POET. *Not go!*

SMITH. Now what in hell's the matter with you?

ROMANCER. Is it about the toothbrush?

TRUSTY. No, it's about the Bible!

SMITH. Come again! Set 'em up in the other alley.

POET. I don't know what you're talking about!

TRUSTY. Well, as I was saying to the Guard this very afternoon, "Mr. Thompson," says I, "I don't know but what the Lord's done right by me. Here I am," says I, "a trusty, a man of responsibility in this community; I worked up to it from the bottom," I says, "with the help of the Lord God and His excellent Book. What was I before I come here? A wanderer on the face of the earth, a tramp, a bum. What did the world give to me?" says I. "I had no responsibility, and no man trusted me —"

ROMANCER. What's the Bible got to do with it?

TRUSTY. "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity," says the Bible; and "Ye shall not follow after strange gods," and "Never look a gift horse in the teeth," and "Let sleeping dogs lie," and —

POET. What does all this mean?

TRUSTY. It means that I'm well enough off here. It means that I'm a man of position in this jail, and if I go out into the world, I'll be nothing but a bum again. No, sir, I'd be lost outside in the world.

ROMANCER. So be it, old man. We have given you your chance.

SMITH (*brusquely*). And you have thrown it away. Farewell! I'm glad we've got that old nut off our chest. Now let's move.

POET. One moment. What he has said stirs me deeply. I wonder if I am not making a dreadful mistake! Have I, any more than he, a place in the world outside?

ROMANCER. But your public!

SMITH. But the magazines!

POET. I have told you my line was Liberty. For God's sake, how can I write about Freedom when I'm free?

ROMANCER. And thou, Brutus?

SMITH (*almost tearfully*). Is everybody crazy? (*To Romancer*) Say, are you going to turn me down, too? For Heaven's sake, quit this place before you go off your nut!

ROMANCER (*melodramatically*). I will! (*He clasps Smith's hand*) We two shall go together — out into God's free air, to breathe the stirring wind of Liberty, to hold up our heads once more with God's free creatures. (*Including the others in a sweeping gesture*) And as for you, craven trucklers that you are — you who prefer the comfortable security of this place to the buffetings of life — I do not condemn you. I pity you! (*To Smith*) And now, comrade, to work!

[*He looks around for his file.*

SMITH (*swiftly*). We haven't any time to lose. I just heard the four o'clock bell ring. At four-fifteen they change the guard and all will be discovered!

ROMANCER (*with a start*). Four-fifteen! Then we have only fifteen minutes! My God, man, we can't do it!

SMITH. Can't do it? Why not?

ROMANCER. Because it takes twenty minutes to file through an iron bar. We're lost!

SMITH (*triumphantly*). No, we're not! Look! (*He throws open the window*) There are no bars!

ROMANCER. No bars! My God! No bars!

TRUSTY. That's what I tried to tell you!

POET. Why, I could have told you that!

SMITH. Hurry! Hurry! What's the matter?

ROMANCER (*looking at file with a dazed expression on his face*). I — I don't understand. There's nothing like this in all fiction. No wall, no guard to shoot, and now, not even a little iron bar to file. (*Suddenly*) And you knew, damn you, all the time, and you didn't tell me! (*Snarling and taking a step toward Trusty*) I've a notion to kill you for that! (*Then stopping and gazing at the file*) Front teeth gone, for *this!*

SMITH. Only five minutes left. Say, are you coming?

ROMANCER (*fiercely, turning to him*). Coming! Of course I'm not coming, sir! What's the use of escaping from a prison you can just walk out of? No man of honor would take advantage of such weakness!

TRUSTY. That's the kind of talk I like, by George!

POET. Hear! Hear!

SMITH (*standing up on chair*). Well, the difference between you sapheads and me is that I *want to get out* and you just think you do. You're playing a little game where the rules are more important than who wins. I'm willing to grant that you have it on me as far as honor, and patriotism, and reputation go, but all I want is Freedom. So, if you don't mind, gentlemen, I'll just be on my way. [*He begins to climb through the window.*

ROMANCER. What? Do you mean to tell us you're going to play us a dirty trick like that?

SMITH (*astonished, turning around*). What do you mean, dirty trick?

ROMANCER. I mean that when we three decided that it was impossible for a gentleman to escape, you turned right

around and tried to get away behind our backs. I mean that you betrayed us — that you want to save your neck at the expense of ours!

TRUSTY. The coward!

POET. The traitor! Seize him!

[*Romancer and Trusty do so, pulling him down by the legs.*

SMITH (*struggling*). Let me go, damn you! I never did anything to you — let me go! What right have you to stop me?

[*They drag him down center.*

ROMANCER. The right of a soldier to shoot a deserter.

POET. Why give him any reason? What can *he* know of honor?

SMITH. You hypocrites! Just because you aren't as free as I am, you're jealous.

[*He struggles.*

TRUSTY. Hark! The guard is changing!

[*Smith almost breaks away when the door opens, and enter two Guards.*

POET, TRUSTY, ROMANCER. Help! Help!

[*Both guards level their rifles at the group, and Smith gives up struggling.*

SMITH. Thank God! At last here's somebody sane!

FIRST GUARD. What's the matter here? How did these men get in this cell?

SECOND GUARD (*seeing the hole*). Here's how they got in. Whew! Jail-delivery, eh? Why, they must have been working on this hole for years. Come on there, Trusty, answer up!

TRUSTY. I will, sir. The prisoner, here (*pointing to Smith*) tried to break prison.

SECOND GUARD. All three of 'em — and yourself, too, I'll bet!

POET. We stopped him!

ROMANCER (*eagerly*). Why, if it hadn't been for us, he would have got away!

FIRST GUARD (*to Smith*). Well, what have you got to say for yourself?

SMITH. There's not a word of truth in it! I was trying to break into a padded cell so I could be free!

CURTAIN

RELEASE

EDWARD H. SMITH

Edward H. Smith was born in Indiana in 1881. During his early youth he lived in Kansas and was educated in the local schools, later completing his education in Germany. In 1902 he entered the newspaper field, was editor of the Sunday edition of the *Chicago Tribune*, and at present is on the staff of the *New York Sunday World*. "Release" is his only play which has been published.

RELEASE

A TRAGEDY

By EDWARD H. SMITH

TO EDITH DELONG SMITH
IN REMEMBRANCE

Characters

LEFTY VENEZIANO RABBIT MORETTO KID MALLOY BULL O'MALLEY	*Gangsters*
TARPEY, a Keeper	

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Applications for permission to produce "Release" must be addressed to Mr. Edward H. Smith, 528 W. 182th Street, New York City. No performance may be given without his consent.

RELEASE

A county jail in up-state New York. Present. Three men are seen through the barred front of a wide shallow cell, which extends almost across the stage. Similar cells suggested right and left. The cage has side and rear walls of masonry with a small barred window in the rear. Four bunks in pairs, one above the other, are fixed to the rear wall. Otherwise the cell contains nothing but two stool chairs and four galvanized buckets. Entrance to the cage is through a steel door in the lower left-hand corner of the cell front.

Rabbit and Kid are moving about restlessly in the cell. Lefty sits on a stool, sulking.

LEFTY (*suspiciously*). Whot's Bull doin' s'long wid dat mouthpiece?

KID (*peering off left through the bars*). He's tryin' to git us out o' dis. Give um time.

RABBIT. It's awrful waitin' here, not knowin' —

LEFTY. W'y didn' ya let *me* go talk to de lawyer?

KID. We wanted Bull, tha's w'y.

LEFTY. But it's *me* dat's up agin it —

RABBIT. Thought you said we was all in ut the same.

LEFTY. We are, but —. How d' I know wot Bull's cooking up out dere?

KID. Bull's a *right* guy.

LEFTY. Didn' dat Willie dump us already to save hisself?

KID. Willie ain't one o' de gang. Ya gotta spec a louse showfer ya picked up on de street to cough his guts.

LEFTY. Bull'll cross us to save hisself, same as anybody.

KID. Yer wrong, ya fink!

LEFTY (*moves his stool and sits down dejectedly*). Aw, dat mouthpiece can't do no good, nohow.

KID. Bull says he kin.

LEFTY. Bull's nuts. We gits a tumble an' de cops grabs us right off de bat. Den dat damn Willie belches all he knows. Den de Kid's moll turns inside out. How's any lawyer gonna beat dat?

KID. Ya tink dey got us?

LEFTY. Ta rights!

RABBIT. Good Gawd!

KID. (*moving uneasily*). Dey won't send us all to de *chair?*

LEFTY. W'y won't dey?

RABBIT. *Four* men fer croaking *one?*

LEFTY. De four of us was dere.

KID. T'ree didn' 'ave nuttin' to do wid de *killin'*.

LEFTY. Know de law, doncha?

RABBIT. Lissen, Lefty: De four of us goes out on a job to git a little jack — not meanin' to kill nobody —. Ya mean to say de whole gang's in fer it de same as de guy wot did de croakin'?

LEFTY. Tryin' to quit, Rabbit?

RABBIT. Naw —, but dey only send ya to de chair fer firs' degree —. Das premeditated.

KID. An' we wasn' premeditatin' no killin'.

LEFTY. Wot's de use arguin'? If a mob goes out graftin' an' some simp gets killed de whole push goes to de chair. *Das de law in dis state.*

RABBIT. It's murder to top Kid an' Bull an' me! *We* didn' kill no one.

LEFTY. But it's all right fer *me*, huh?

RABBIT. Well . . . ya killed th' ole man, didn' ya?

LEFTY. De district attorney don' know dat.

KID. Naw, an' he can't fin' out, neither. We ain't a gonna tell 'im.

LEFTY. Ya better not! — Ya can't! — It wouldn' do you no good, nohow. We was all dere. De law says we're all guilty. You fellers as much as me!

RABBIT. 'Sa lousy deal; 'sall I gotta say.

LEFTY. Yaaaaaaaas; an' ya kin blame de Kid — blabbin' his head off to his broad.

KID. It's my fault, huh?

LEFTY. Ya moll-struck boob! If ya hadn' quatched to dat bimbo dey never could convict us.

KID (*menacing*). Wat 'bout you so fast on yer gun? Ef ya didn't shoot dat old stiff we wouldn't be here!

LEFTY. Didn' I shoot to git de coin fer *you* guys? Didn' dat old stiff put up a fight? Yer *all* eaten me cause I had de hard luck to settle dat ole bloke. Now ya all'd like to duck out on me. — But yer gonna stick. Buhlieve me, yer gonna —!

[*Commotion off left.*

KID. Here's Bull!

[*Bull O'Malley appears walking before Keeper Tarpey, who is in uniform. Bull measures up to his gang name — a huge ox of a man. He has a strut, and holds himself in the pose of a pugilist receiving the plaudits of the ring, where he is, perhaps, more at home than in crime. Being an indifferent hand at either, he has had to work in both fields, with success sufficient to bring him to his present dilemma. He is thirty. Tarpey is fifty, fat, ruddy and shrewd, with all the characteristic mendacity that grows in men set to watch other men. The door is swung open and Bull enters the cage. Tarpey locks him in.*

TARPEY. Waall . . . now you seen yer lawyer, I s'pose yu'll be ready to see tha district attorney — He'll be sendin' down any time now.

BULL. All right, Tarpey.

TARPEY (*lingering*). Didjer lawyer tell yu to come clean and fess up?

LEFTY. Beat it, Screws. We —

TARPEY. Wanna talk, huh? Not gonna come clean, huh? — Waall, *that* ain't gonna save yu from thu chair, m'boys. *Buhlieve* me, this feller upstairs don't stand fer no foolin'. He's a wise bird.

BULL. So wise he don't know w'ich one he —

TARPEY (*shrewdly*). I guess that's worryin' you more'n him, m'boy. — By the way, djever see that chair down at

Sing Sing? — Ya know I was down there onct, ta see 'em top a feller that killed his wife.

LEFTY. Can it, Screws!

[*Bull, Rabbit, and the Kid move about impatiently. Lefty is plainly responding to the keeper's inquisition.*

TARPEY (*with pantomime*). They got the chair in a white room, nice and clean, like a room in a 'ospital. The chair's at this end, screwed to the floor, an' there's a little door over here where they bring you in. See, ya come in like this and here's the *chair*. Then they grab ya an' slam ya into it, like that! In a second they got belts around ya here (*indicates his waist*) and aroun' yer arms and legs, so ya can't move — An' then the cap comes down —

LEFTY. For Christ's sake, stop!

TARPEY (*blandly*). Wot's the matter with the boy?

LEFTY. I can't stand it, Screws!

TARPEY (*relentlessly*). An' then — the cap comes down — like this — and fits yer dome. — Then they brings a black mask over yer face. Then there's a guy over here. He's got this hand on the switch. The bell rings — ting-a-ling-ling — he throws her in a little, bz-z-z-z-z-z-z. Just —

[*Lefty lets out a screech and begins kicking and shouting.*

KID. Shut up, Screws! Aincha got no heart?

TARPEY (*innocently*). A bunch of brave killers, so delicate like, huh? — Waall, anyhow, that's all there is to it, 'cept the autopsy, w'ere they rips yu open to —

KID. Shut yer face, ya damn beast!

[*The keeper draws back, startled at the man's vehemence.*

BULL. That third-degree stuff don't go, Tarpey. Run along —

TARPEY (*shrugging*). Think it over while yu kin, m'boy. Any time yu got somethin' ta tell me jes rattle on the bars.

[*He goes off slowly, Bull watching him till he's out of sight.*

BULL (*to Lefty*). That ole crook's jes tryin' ta make ya come through. Aincha wise?

[*The men crowd about Bull expectantly.*

RABBIT. Well?

KID. What'd the mouthpiece say?

BULL. They found Lefty's gat where he ditched it.

LEFTY (*blanching*). Dey found de gun?

BULL. An' the hockshop where ya bought it.

RABBIT. Good *night* fer *us!*

[*Silence.*

KID. So dat's all de hope dat lawyer gives us?

BULL. Pretty near. The *four of us* is got just one chance.

LEFTY (*tortured*). Yes? Yes?

BULL. We gotta plead guilty.

RABBIT. Plead guilty!!

KID (*aghast*). Wot'll *that* git us?

BULL. We pleads it second degree.

LEFTY (*seeing himself saved from death*). An' we don' go to dat chair!

KID (*lighting*). Will they stand fer it?

BULL. The mouthpiece is upstairs now findin' out.

KID. Bull, if ut goes through, ya saved all our lives!

RABBIT. Aw, dey *got* us. — Ef you tink dat distric' 'torney's gonna let us git away wid pleas when he kin send four guys to the chair an' make a name for hisself, I DON'T.

BULL. We hadda try it, Rabbit. It's the only chanct the *four of us* is got.

RABBIT. How'll we know de answer?

BULL. Our lawyer'll shoot us a scratch. It oughta be here now.

RABBIT. An ef dat note says "nuttin' doin'" —?

LEFTY. He's *gotta* let us plead guilty.

RABBIT. Like hell he's gotta.

KID (*tentatively*). Mebbe he will. He's yooman, ain't he?

BULL. There's a chance. Tryin' four men fer murder costs money. I figgered maybe this district attorney'll dope it out that savin' the coin'll win 'im more votes in this hick county than sendin' men ta die.

LEFTY. An' no guy wants to have four dead men on his mind. He can't sleep. Ain't I right?

BULL. We gotta look in, I says. But it ain't because he'll lose any sleep over us or cause he's yooman. That feller may go light on us, but it won't be 'cause he's givin' us justice. It'll be 'cause it's gittin' somethin' fer *him.* Tha's all.

RABBIT. Yas — an' ef he figgers agin us; — wot den?

BULL. Then we gotta put our nuts together an' find the way out. We gotta fight ta live. Four men can't go ta that chair. You guys kin lay down an' take tha dose ef ya wanna, but not me. Bull O'Malley wants ta live an' there's somethin' in 'im's gonna fight. Ef he's gotta die fer wot one a you guys done he'll die game. But before he does that he's gonna fight game! — Who's wid him?

KID. Who said Bull's wrong?

RABBIT. I'm widja.

LEFTY. Me, too.

BULL. Then we sticks together fer the good of the bunch — an' no hollerin' ef the game's lost.

[*Tarpey hustles in from the right.*

RABBIT (*at the bars*). Shhhhh!

LEFTY. Got a scratch fer us?

[*The men press forward. Tarpey stops before the cage, deliberately opens note and reads.*

BULL. Here! That's mine!

TARPEY. When ya get it, it is.

RABBIT. Dat's private, ya damn flatfoot!

TARPEY (*chuckling*). So, yu were gonna take pleas so nice, wuz yu? (*The men press themselves painfully against the bars*) Trying ta duck thu chair so neat, eh? — (*He passes the note to Lefty*) Naw ya don't, m' boys; naw ya don't!

LEFTY (*staring at note*). We gotta stand trial!

[*The Keeper laughs shortly and strolls off as he came.*

RABBIT (*after a pause*). We're as good as four dead men!

BULL (*snatches the note from Lefty and tears it up*). Not yet. — Now! We gotta work fast!!

LEFTY. Wotta ya mean?

BULL. There's a way *three* of us can be saved.

LEFTY (*with rising suspicion*). Wot way's dat?

BULL. One man's gotta go to the front an' die for the rest.

[*The men stare at each other and at Bull.*

KID. Ya mean — ?

BULL. I mean if one of us goes up there to the district attorney and says, "I croaked that ole man. I done it alone." — Well, then, the other three 'ud git out of it.

KID. An' the guy wot goes the route?

BULL. He does his Becker.

KID (*falls back, thinking*). I see — *the chair.*

[*The men draw away.*

BULL (*laughing shortly*). Well, any volunteers?

LEFTY (*with mounting nervousness*). Did that lawyer say it'd work?

BULL. He did.

LEFTY. They'd never believe it.

BULL. They gotta, an' they will. Ef I go up an' say we all agreed not to shoot an' then I shot anyhow — that's all there's to ut. It may not gitcha 'way clean, but yu won't go to tha chair. No jury'll stand fer it. It's a plain lay, I tell ya. It's *one* dead fer *four*. I say, better one. — Now, who's it gonna be?

[*Pause.*

LEFTY. I — I — I gotcha, Bull.

BULL. You have, huh?

LEFTY. I said yu'd cook up somethin' out dere. Wotcha mean to say is: Lefty, you go die fer us —

BULL. I didn't say it, did I?

LEFTY. Naw, but dat's wotcha mean. — Well, I won't do it. Ef you wanna go down ta Sing Sing and take dat burn, you fer it, but not me. My life's as good as yours an' I mean to fight fer it, same as you. I wanna chance fer my white alley!

BULL (*coldly*). Yer gonna git ut.

LEFTY. You said it, I am!

BULL. One of us is gotta die, that's all; an' three is gotta live.

LEFTY. A fair chance, I want; fair as any of ya.

BULL. That's wot yu'll git, no mor', no less. Listen! That district attorney don't know who croaked that ole guy, an' he can't fin' out, ef we stick together. Now the Kid didn't, an' neither did Rabbit. Neither did I. But I'm willin' ta say I did — ef I lose.

LEFTY (*nervously*). Wot're ya gettin' at?

BULL. We gotta throw fer it.

LEFTY (*falls back*). Trow — fer a man's life?

BULL. Fer *three* men's lives and *one* man's death.

LEFTY. Jesu Christi!

BULL. Quick, or it's too late.

KID. I'm game.

RABBIT (*examining the cell*). Ain't there no way out, Bull? Can't we lamm dis place?

BULL. We got no tools an' we can't make a break. An' ef we could it would do us no good. We got no darb an' no friends outside; no chance fer a getaway. We figgered all that. It don't go.

RABBIT. Then we gotta do it. I'm game wid de rest.

BULL. Lefty; want any better'n that?

LEFTY. Dis is on de level?

BULL. Whaddaya mean? Djever see me w'en I was crooked?

LEFTY. Shoot.

[*Bull rattles the door.*

LEFTY. Whaddaya up to?

BULL. We gotta have somethin' to throw wid.

KID. 'Sright. There ain't a jit in de crowd.

LEFTY. Ya ain't gonna crack to dat Screws?

[*Tarpey appears, rattling his keys.*

TARPEY. What's up?

BULL. Listen, Tarpey; lend us a half buck like a good feller, will ya?

TARPEY. Lendja wot?

BULL. Jest fer a little w'ile. We'll give it right back.

TARPEY (*crossly*). Whadda ya want with ut?

BULL. Jes' play a little game to amuse ourselves while we're waitin', tha's all.

TARPEY (*getting half dollar from his pocket*). Amuse yourselves, huh? Waaall (*Gives it*) No funny work, now, or —

BULL. Thanks. Yu kin come fer it purty soon.

TARPEY. Bulieve me, I will.

[*Goes off, shaking his head.*

BULL. Now then, we're ready.

LEFTY. How ya gonna flip?

BULL. We kin stay in the pairs we was when they brought us here, Rabbit and Kid on one side and you an' me on the other. 'T's about right anyhow — one Wop an' one Mick on a side. Suit ya?

LEFTY. Go ahead.

BULL. O. K. then. Now we flops first ta see what two is out.

RABBIT. Wadda ya mean, out?

BULL. Ef you two goes out, yer lucky. Then me'n' Lefty's gotta flip ta see w'ich one goes to tha chair.

KID. Gee!

BULL. Ef it turns agin ya, then you'n' the Kid has the priv'lege o' choosin' tha dead man.

KID. Ugh!

BULL. Got it straight?

RABBIT. We gotcha.

[*Lefty does not answer, but prowls nervously about the cell.*

BULL. Who's gonna flop?

RABBIT. Tha Kid shoots fer us. He's lousy wid luck.

BULL (*giving Kid the coin*). Then *we calls*. (*To Lefty*) Suit you, ole feller?

LEFTY (*sullenly*). Wotsa difference?

BULL. Wait a minnit! Don' it suitcha, Lefty?

LEFTY. 'Sall right.

BULL. Ya got nawthin' better, have ya?

LEFTY. I'm sa'asfied, 'slong as ut's done square.

BULL. Let 'er go, Kid.

[*The Kid shakes the coin between his cupped palms.*

KID. All set, now! Here she goes. Here she —

LEFTY. Jiggeroo!

KID. Wot's wrong?

LEFTY (*digging into his shirt*). Hold on! (*He brings out a small metal crucifix worn on a tape about his neck*) Ya gotta swear on dis here cross!

BULL. Is that better'n the law o' the gang?

LEFTY. You gotta take oat' you're gonna go de route ef ya lose. You gotta ask God ta witness dat de one dat loses goes to da chair fer de rest.

(*He crosses himself. The men stir uneasily. Lefty searches their faces*) Come on! Yer all Cath'lics.

BULL. I'm nawthin'.

LEFTY. Swear on dis ting.

BULL (*smiling*). Ef that sa'asfies ya, shoot.

LEFTY (*hands crucifix to Rabbit*). Start it.

RABBIT. Holy God, I swear ta do my bit ef I lose.

[*He kisses it, crosses himself, and gives it to the Kid.*

KID. I swear.

[*Kisses the emblem, passes it to Lefty. Then stands crossing himself, his eyes down.*

LEFTY (*raising the crucifix*). Holy God, hear me! (*Falls on his knees and mumbles passionately*) Jesus, Savior, hear me! Mary, Mother of God, grant my prayer! Holy Mary, intercede for me! Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, spare me, save my life, intercede for me, save me! Spare me! I don' wanna die! Save me!

[*He sobs and is silent. After a pause he rises, kisses the cross, and holds it out to Bull.*

RABBIT. I didn't hear ya swear nawthin'.

LEFTY (*indignantly but avoiding Rabbit's eyes*). I did —

RABBIT. Not as I heard.

LEFTY. I swore, I tell ya.

KID. We didn' hear ya. Do it again!

LEFTY (*looks about, hunted. Dangles the cross*). W'y do I have to swear twice?

BULL. Come on, Guinney! It's your proposition. Let's hear ya.

LEFTY (*after hesitation raises the cross*). I swear.

[*He reaches it to Bull, who takes it with no show of reverence.*

BULL (*clearly*). My word's better'n this business.

LEFTY. Swear, like we did!

BULL. I'm gonna, don' worry, but it don't mean nawthin' to me. I never seen yer God an' I don't make 'im. He never done nothin' fer me, an' I don't believe in 'im.

LEFTY. Damn infidel.

BULL. That religion stuff was invented for people that's scared to die. I ain't no coward an' I don't need no God.

RABBIT. You're temptin' God's vengeance, Bull.

BULL. But here's wot I gotta say — I swear ef I lose I'll go to the chair fer a murder I didn't do. I'll go widout a holler an' widout bein' afeared. I'll go fer me pals cause I give me word. (*Lifts crucifix above his head*) I swear it by a God I don't have no trust in, cause I think he's wrong — (*The others gasp*) An' I swear it by Bull O'Malley, cause I know he's *right.*

[*Tosses the crucifix to one of the bunks.*

LEFTY. God'll show you —

BULL. Flip the coin!

[*Kid takes his position in the center, shakes the half-dollar between his cupped palms, breathes on it, rubs it against his trousers. His hands shake and he drops it. It rolls away under a chair and he scrambles after it.*

RABBIT (*nervously*). Jesus, Kid! Cancha hold on to it?

LEFTY (*agitated*). Freeze to it, ya fool!

[*Bull smiles, takes out a cigarette, lights it, and waits. The Kid recovers the coin, breathes on it as on a pair of dice, rubs it against his clothing, then against his forehead. He kisses it and speaks to it.*

KID. Come on, Betsy! Don't fool me now! Don't fool me this time! Ya know I always loved ja! Don't trow me down! Treat me right, Babay! Treat me right — fer Gawds' sake!!

BULL. You call, Lefty.

LEFTY. Heads!

KID (*agonized*). Oh, treat me right!! (*He flips the coin above his head. It glitters a moment, falls with a clink, runs in a circle, stops and spins. The four men bend toward it with bulging eyes*) Turn tails! Tails!! Tails!!!

LEFTY. Heads, damn ya! Heads!!

RABBIT. Gawd!

KID. It's stoppin'!

RABBIT. It's turnin'!

LEFTY (*averting a distorted face*). It's down! Jesus Mary! — It's down! ! — Wot is it?

BULL (*coldly*). Tails.

[*Lefty groans. Rabbit and Kid take in their breath with loud sounds of relief. They shake each other's hands. All mop their faces. Lefty shifts from foot to foot in torment.*

BULL. Take a good look at it, ever'body.

[*The others do not move. Lefty goes and bends down.*

LEFTY (*drawing away. Hoarsely*). It's tails.

BULL (*briskly*). Now it's between you and me, Lefty. (*Picks up the coin*). Ready?

LEFTY. W-w-wait a minit, c-cancha?

RABBIT. Sure, Bull. A man needs a chance ta get his breath after dat.

KID. I trowed fer some stakes in my time, but — gee! (*Striking his heart*) I tinked de old pump was gonna blow up on me dat time.

LEFTY (*morosely*). Dry up!

KID. I ain't botherin' ya, am I?

LEFTY. Ya won, dincha? Ya ain't gotta crow 'bout it.

BULL. Let's stop the guff and get it over. (*He shakes the coin between his palms*) Wot's yer call?

[*Lefty comes toward him with tense movements. The other two draw back respectfully in the presence of the issue of death.*

LEFTY (*prayerfully*). I ask Your protection —

BULL (*shaking the coin*). S'pose I asked it, too? He'd 'ave a tough time pleasin' us both, huh?

LEFTY. You're as good as a dead man!

BULL. Yes, I s'pose so. Ef I lose, it's God's will. Ef ya lose, it's tough luck — Well, wot's yer call?

LEFTY (*trembling*). Trow.

[*Bull flips the coin with scant ceremony. As he does so Lefty makes a choking, evasive sound, that may be either "HEADS" or "TAILS." The instant the coin falls Bull puts his foot on it.*

BULL. Wot's yer call?

LEFTY. I called, didn't I? Wadda ya mean vy —

BULL (*with menace*). Call so we kin getcha.

LEFTY. Didn' I call? I—I—(*To the other two*) Didn' I call?

RABBIT. Ya called, but no one knows wotcha said.

KID. Be on de level. Wot's yer call?

LEFTY. I said heads.

BULL. Heads. That's better. (*He lifts his foot and steps away*) Wot is it?

[*Lefty is drawn slowly toward the coin. He takes a step, leans down, averts his face, and slowly turns his neck. A gasp escapes the Kid. Lefty shudders and brings his eyes down to the coin. He stares, shrinks, is shaken with deep trembling. He draws away as slowly as he approached, takes a few steps backwards and sinks upon the vacant stool.*

RABBIT (*after a dead silence*). It's tails!

KID (*in a queer voice*). Bull wins!

RABBIT (*hysterically*). O Gawd!

BULL. Now! Was it God — or luck?

[*Kid and Rabbit hastily cross themselves. Lefty sits huddled on his stool, tries to open his mouth but sinks back into something bordering on collapse. The others begin to yawn and move about. Bull finds an uncomfortable seat on the edge of one of the lower bunks and smokes. Kid drags the second stool forward and tilts back against the wall opposite Lefty. Rabbit leans against the bars.*

RABBIT. Tarpey'll be along fer his four bits now.

KID. 'N' dat distric' 'torney —

BULL (*softly, after a pause*). Ya figgered out wot yer gonna say, Lefty? — He'll be sendin' down fer ya —

LEFTY (*morosely*). Ya ain't gotta tell *me* wot ta do!

BULL (*withdrawing*). All right, ole feller.

[*The men smoke and yawn.*

BULL (*with rough tenderness*). Lissen, Lefty — !

LEFTY (*grunts*). Yuh.

BULL. Lissen, ole feller; ya better lay down over here an' try ta poun' yer ear a w'ile. Ya'll need all the strength ya got w'en that guy sends down fer ya.

KID (*patting Lefty*). Go awn, ole dawg; take a flop fer yaself.

LEFTY (*rising suddenly*). Lissen ta me —!

BULL. Yeah?

LEFTY (*subsiding*). Aw, let ut go.

[*He staggers back and throws himself into one of the lower bunks. Bull takes the vacated stool and draws it forward. The men are silent a few moments, glancing toward the bunk.*

KID. He'll be some sore distric' 'torney, wot?

RABBIT. Ya said it.

KID. Funny game, huh?

RABBIT. Wot?

KID. Makin' yer livin' sendin' guys up to git baked.

RABBIT. Gawd!

KID. 'N' hopin' ya'll git ta sen' up some big cheese, some day — some guy like Becker. Funny, ain't it? We croaks a guy an' gits baked fer it, 'n' one o' dem guys croaks a dozen 'n' dey makes 'im gov'nor.

RABBIT. 'Sall in da way ya does it, Kid — Lemme a butt, Bull.

[*Bull silently passes a cigarette. Rabbit smokes.*

KID (*glancing toward Lefty's bunk*). He's all in.

RABBIT. Poor feller.

BULL. 'S'e sleepin'?

RABBIT (*steps over to the bunk, peers in, listens*). Looks like he's dead ta de world.

BULL. Let 'im snooze.

KID (*subdued*). He's actin' kinda phoney, ef ya ask me.

BULL. Ya would too, ef ya hadda do his job.

RABBIT. Ya dink he'll do it?

BULL. Sure he will.

KID (*his back against the bars*). Wot's gonna happen *t'us* now?

BULL. They'll let us off wid a hold-up charge, mebbe.

KID. Five years — mebbe ten —!

RABBIT. Dat distric' 'torney'll never let us go dat light.

BULL. He'll make us stand fer second degree.

KID. Twenty years to life —!

RABBIT. Aw, Gawd!

KID. Ya kickin'? Ain't it better'n da chair?

RABBIT. Maybe — But tinka spendin' yer life up dere.

KID. Twenty years.

RABBIT. We'll be ole men den.

KID. Whadda ya mean, old?

RABBIT. Ya'll be forty-tree . . . an' me forty-five. B'lieve me, das old fer guys that's been twenty years in da bighouse.

BULL. An' Bull'll be fifty.

[*Lefty leans his head out of his bunk and listens. They do not observe him.*

KID (*smoking*). Well, ef I gotta I gotta. But I know wot I'm a gonna do w'en I gets out.

RABBIT. Wot?

KID. I gives all dis graft da go-by. De ole Kid's gonna beat it to da bushes when he's out.

RABBIT. Same here!

KID. An' he's gonna start all over — lay off de booze, cut da fly molls an' go ta work.

RABBIT. Ya said a mouthful!

KID. An' ef I gets a start I'm gonna live on da level wid some square broad.

RABBIT. Dat's sometin' to live fer!!

BULL (*throws cigarette away*). Yeaa, that's fine ef anythin' better'n a sow er a bitch'll have ya then.

RABBIT. *Dey* won't know wot we was.

BULL. But they'll know wot we are — old an' sick an' broken down.

KID. Mebbe not. Ya gotta live perty clean up dere.

BULL. Too damn clean.

[*He rises. Lefty's head disappears. Bull leans against the bars.*

RABBIT. Tinka layin' dere all dat time widout no fun; widout one good laugh, ner a good smoke —

KID. Ner a meal fit fer a dawg! Not one good souse ta let off da steam!

[*Lefty leans out and hears every word.*

RABBIT. 'N' no burlyscue fer us now —

KID. 'Member how we used ter sit up front an' kid dem chorus molls? — No more leg shows —

BULL. Not one woman in twenty years!

RABBIT. 'Sawrful!

BULL. It's slow dyin' of ev'rythin' that's live in ya.

KID. But it's better'n da chair! W'en dey send ya ta git baked it's no fun, no drinks, no women *never* again — no nuttin'! — Dat's worse!!

[*Lefty throws himself out of his bunk and runs forward, screaming.*

LEFTY. I *won't* do it!!!

RABBIT. Ya won't —?

LEFTY. I'm not go'n' up dere an' —

KID. Ya swore, didn' ya?

LEFTY. I'm not gonna —

BULL (*slowly*). Ya lost, di'n't ya, Lefty?

LEFTY. I los' a flip of da coin, das all.

BULL. Ya gonna welch?

LEFTY (*searching about with his eyes*). It wuzzn't on da level.

KID. It was square.

LEFTY. Wot right'd *he* have to put his foot on ut? Mebbe 'twoulda come up heads.

RABBIT. Ye hadn' called, ya fink!

LEFTY. We shoulda trowed agin. It was foul, I tell ya. I bin tinkin'ut over an' I won't stand fer't.

RABBIT (*in disgust*). Ya quittin', bastard!

BULL (*interfering*). Nix, Rabbit — Ya say yer not sa'asfied, Lefty?

LEFTY (*shrinks from Bull's eyes*). 'Swot I said.

BULL. Ya think we shoulda flopped over?

LEFTY. 'Swot I said.

BULL. Well, I don' want no guy to get croaked fer me unless he says it's on the square. — I'll flip ya agin!

[*Even Lefty's breath is taken.*

RABBIT. Doncha do ut, Bull!

KID. He ain't worth it.

BULL (*picking up the coin from the floor*). Come on, Lefty. Your t'row this time.

LEFTY (*eagerly reaching for it*). Give it here.

RABBIT (*holding Bull's arm*). Yer crazy, Bull! Yer takin' a double chanct on yer life.

BULL (*shaking him off*). Somebody's gotta! — We can't all take the chair.

KID. He won't stick ef he loses.

BULL. He'll stick. I give ya me word.

LEFTY (*frightened*). Wadda ya mean?

BULL. I mean whoever loses this time *dies* fer his pals, an' no gettin' out of ut.

[*Lefty looks about him as if for escape. Bull fastens him with his eye.*

BULL. Throw, Wop!

[*He holds out the coin.*

LEFTY (*taking it after hesitation*). Wot's yer call?

BULL. W'en ya throw, I call.

[*Lefty shakes the coin slowly between his hands. He stops, shifts his ground, stands first in one place, then in another. His brain is working rapidly and darkly.*

BULL. Hurry!

LEFTY (*turning*). W-Wait a minnit, w-woncher?

KID. Wot's wrong now?

BULL. Throw! We got no time to waste.

[*Lefty reluctantly chooses a position near the bars, with his face half averted from the audience and half turned toward*

the bunks on the left. He juggles the coin for a moment and then throws it awkwardly.

BULL (*as the coin is thrown*). I call tails.

KID. Tails is de call.

[*Whether through design or nervousness Lefty has thrown the coin so that it rolls under the bunks to the rear left. The moment it falls he dives after it.*

LEFTY. Down!

BULL (*steps before him and holds him back with his legs*). Let 'er settle first.

[*After a moment he withdraws and Lefty crawls toward the coin on hands and knees.*

LEFTY (*pretending*). W'ere is it? W'ere'd it go?

RABBIT. Keep yer eye on 'im, Bull.

[*Lefty shifts about on his knees and maneuvers nearer the coin. He bends forward, sees what has been turned up and stiffens. For a moment he seems about to collapse. Then he marshals all his wits, glances covertly over either shoulder and shifts again. His left hand steals out toward the coin. Rabbit and Kid make an instinctive movement, but hold back.*

KID (*warning*). Look out!

[*Lefty darts his hand for the coin, but too late. Bull has kicked him away from the fateful cast. Lefty lies for a few moments, snarling. Then he crawls away and drags himself up on his stool and sits, huddled and miserable.*

KID. It's tails!

RABBIT. Ya satisfied, Lefty?

[*No answer.*

KID. Well, ya oughta be. Ya had two chances fer yer life.

RABBIT. Now ya *gotta* go de route.

KID. So's dere won't be no more foolin', I'm gonna call dat Screws, an' ya kin make yer spiel. (*He goes to the door and puts his hands on the bars*) Ya ready?

LEFTY (*starts up. Hoarsely*). Wait!

KID (*taking hold of the door*). Wot's wrong now?

LEFTY. I won't!

[*The three men turn on him with one movement. He recoils*

against the right wall of the cell and stands half crouching, but defiant.

RABBIT. Ya won't?

LEFTY. No! I wanna live!

BULL (*approaching with cold menace*). So do we! — Ya swore, didn' ya? Ya had two chances, didn' ya? Ya heard me say ya'd go the route, ef ya lost, did'n' cha? — Ya lost, did'n' cha? — Well, yer gonna go, buhlieve me, yer gonna go!

[*He opens his hands and takes a step toward Lefty.*

LEFTY (*shrinking in terror*). Wait, Bull! For Christ's sake!

BULL. Wot is ut?

LEFTY (*feverishly*). Yer jus' robbin' me of —

BULL. Ya made a deal wid us, dincha?

LEFTY. Lissen! Dincha say we'd stan' tagether? Ya did say that. Ef we do we gotta chance. De guv'ner won' send four of us to da chair. He won't. But he'll send me ef I go alone. Le's stan' tagether! Le's fight ut out tagether, all four of us. (*Bull draws back in disgust*). Das the way ta do it! Le's stan' tagether! —

BULL. Cut that stuff, Wop! —

LEFTY. I don't wanna take dat chair!

BULL. Ya gotta go.

LEFTY. I wanna chance ta git free — I got sometin' to live fer —!

BULL. Ya gotta go, I said.

LEFTY. I heard wot ya said 'bout wimmin. I want as much as you. I got da same right to me chance.

BULL. Ya had yer chance an' ya lost. Now yer gonna go.

LEFTY (*defiantly*). Den t'ree guys goes wid me.

BULL. Ya go alone!

LEFTY. Ef ya sends *one* man over da route, I sends t'ree. I swear it!

BULL. That'll do ya no good. Ya kin go by the law of tha State, like a man — or like a rat, by the law of the gang! (*He draws back a little and pulls up his sleeves*) Which'll ya have?

LEFTY (*in horror*). Ya won't!

BULL. I will, or me mother's a slut!

LEFTY. Ya can't!

BULL (*advancing*). Ef ya says yes, Kid'll call the Screws. Ef ya says no — I'll do me part. — Now, then — I give ya three counts. ONE! (*Lefty shrinks against the wall, cowering and trembling*) TWO!

LEFTY (*in choked undertone*). Kid! Rabbit! Help!

RABBIT. Help yaself. Ya know th' answer.

[*Kid turns his back.*

BULL. THREE!

[*Bull moves on Lefty.*

LEFTY (*turns suddenly and holds up the crucifix*). Ya'll roast in Hell ef ya do!

[*Bull is arrested for a breath. Then he makes a lunge, tears the crucifix from Lefty's hand and throws it down. Lefty springs at him with all fury. There is a brief, frightful struggle. Bull tears the smaller man's grasp away, pins him against the wall and closes one of his hands about the Italian's throat. Lefty struggles and is still. Bull slowly releases his hold and the limp form sinks to the floor. Bull draws back, panting.*

RABBIT (*kneeling over Lefty*). He's croaked!

KID (*feeling the body*). Ya *killed* him, Bull!

BULL. I said I would.

RABBIT (*straightening up in horror*). God, Bull, dat don't do *us* no good!

KID. We 're gone *sure*, now!

BULL. *Now* we got somethin' to die fer.

[*He sits down and lights a cigarette.*

CURTAIN

THE RUSTY DOOR

HOWARD FORMAN SMITH

Howard Forman Smith studied the arts of the theatre under Thomas Wood Stevens, in the College of Fine Arts, Pittsburgh. Before graduation he became technical director of the school's productions: in 1922 he held a similar position in the Virginia Historical Pageant. "The Rusty Door" and "Blackberryin'" (in "A Treasury of Plays for Women") are his only published plays.

THE RUSTY DOOR

A PLAY

By HOWARD FORMAN SMITH

Characters

MIKE, from Donegal
JERRY, from Harwich, formerly of U. S. S. *Kentucky*
JEPHTHA, from Labrador
LAZARUS, from Mobile
GASKELL, from Gloucester, the Skipper
EVAN RIGGS, from Chatham
LUIS, from Flores
Members of the Crew of the *Colleen Bess*

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Applications for permission to present "The Rusty Door" should be addressed to Norman Lee Swartout, Summit, N. J. No performance may be given without his consent.

THE RUSTY DOOR

SCENE. *On board the Doggerbank trawler* Colleen Bess, *six weeks out of Gloucester, on the Manan Banks off Newfoundland.*

The cabin of the Colleen Bess, *looking aft. Evidently there is more hold and less cabin than is usual in most Gloucestermen. Bunks not only climb the ship's sides in double tiers but range also at right angles along the lazarette at the back. A companionway opens to the deck in the center. The hatch is closed against the weather, but when slid back, the wheel, the white arched taffrail and the heaving skies beyond are disclosed.*

A table with its long way to the beam stands in the center of the cabin. Two benches stand on either side. A ship's lantern swings above. Oilskins, boots, sweaters, and mittens are hung on nails over each of the bunks. A small blackboard also swings from above with 46–47 chalked upon it, indicating the last latitude that was passed to an inquiring square-rigger.

In an upper bunk on the starboard side, Jephtha lies asleep. He is a heavy-set man of some forty years.

Mike, a long-limbed Irishman with a great mop of hair and narrow but quizzical eyes, sits opposing Jerry over a game of checkers. Jerry, a hide-bound Downeasterner, from the nasal drawl and flat a's he utters, is a chunky big-featured man of thirty or so. Both of them are exhaling clouds of smoke from short, stumpy pipes.

MIKE. Put in! Put in!

JERRY. Cripes!

MIKE. I'm lee-bowin' yuh, matey. I'll relave yuh of this little 'un and you'll trim better. Yer checkers are scattered like dories in a flat calm.

JERRY. Yep. But that's a heap sight better than chafin' yer hawser off in port like what you're doin'.

MIKE. Ay. But me little dories don't get twitched under unexpected. They keeps their weather eye open.

JERRY (*relighting his pipe*). It's a bit like trawlin' — this checker-pushin'. Y' have a head on you, Irish, even though you did twist the wheel of an East Boston tug —

MIKE. East Boston tug!

JERRY. Yah! And you can look me in the face arter that! Tugs ain't boats! They'se trundle-beds.

MIKE. Ay, me boy, but take one of thim trundle-beds outside of Boston Light on a foine January day and you'll be thinkin' you're on a Ferris wheel.

JERRY (*laughing*). And what did you do over t'other side, Mike, afore you took up with real sailors? How was the wind fer smugglin' round Ireland? Donegal waters is a good place for it, folks say.

MIKE. The nerve of you navy men is grrand and colossal! 'Twas honest trawlin' I've done iver since I could swing an oar. 'Twas Iceland waters where we hooked 'em.

JERRY. Iceland? We raised Iceland once in the old *Kentucky*. Cripes! She wur like Patagonia. I'll do me fishin' on the Doggerbanks, though Newfoundland ain't too cozy a place to be wrecked on. Did you iver put into Iceland?

MIKE. Yes — fer bait.

JERRY. What be the folks there? Eskimos 'n' huskies?

MIKE. No. The folk there are Danes.

JERRY. Huh! Powerful long cold way from home.

MIKE. Sure. Swedes and Danes are wanderin' folk.

JERRY (*nodding*). Yas, you bump into 'em in every fo'c'sle of a square-rigger hereabouts — couldn't muster a watch without one of 'em.

MIKE (*leaning back against his bunk*). I read in a book once that the Dane folks — this I'm sayin' is hundreds of years back, 'fore you and me was considered at all — the Danes were the only sailors that didn't shiver and shake an' call on all the gods there were — and there was a grrand lot of 'em thin — they were the only men that didn't get the

shivers ivery time they made more than two hundred leagues of westing out of Europe. They must have been the best fishers of their time. The Irish weren't much thin —

JERRY. Nor yit.

MIKE. Ease up! Ease up! Shurre, therre was no Gloucester thin — but listen to what I'm tellin' you.— They only had whaleboats thin in them days, Harwich, whaleboats with square lateens on 'em, like you see off Morocco.

JERRY (*nodding*). Yep. I've picked 'em out from the *Kentucky*.

MIKE. And therre werre not any such schooners like the one we're saltin' down on at prisent — hand me a wisp of strraw out from yon broom. Me pipe's fouled.

JERRY (*handing the broom*). Yeah, she's a tight little box, this *Colleen Bess*, for all she's spoon-bowed —

MIKE (*biting out a straw*). And the skipper tight as a deck-beam.

JERRY (*with a backward glance*). Psst! Pipe down! Gaskell's by the hatch. Wal, what's this you be a-sayin' about those there Danes. I'm thinkin' you blew out yer last wage and share buyin' an Encylopedy Brittainikey 'stead o' new jack boots. This ain't Boston Bay. When the cod is runnin' you can't be holdin' wheel with one hand and readin' about the man who invented water-wings —

MIKE (*scornfully*). Go knock your head on the gurry-butts. All this gun-deck talk! Give an ear now and I'll be addin' to your eddycation. These Danes I'm tellin' you about — I left 'em sailin' west, didn't I? Well, therre was no course-layin' in thim days — hog-yokes and Waterbury clocks. They went sailin' out o' pure curiosity —

JERRY. Curiosity! They wan't no sailors! Only yachtin' fools do thet.

MIKE. Harkee, Kentucky. They raised Iceland. That satisfied 'em for a few hundred years —

JERRY. D'you mean to tell me —

MIKE. They was men, Kentucky. Not deck-swabbers at

thirty per. — After a bit — after a couple of hundred years they got restless again —

JERRY. Curious, y'mean.

MIKE. Yes, inquisitive like. So they up-anchored and bore away to Greenland —

JERRY. Are you goin' to tell me they ran bow-on into the North Pole?

MIKE. Now take a hitch in yer tongue, Kentucky, and give a man sea room. No; they didn't like the looks of that ice chest, so they went over on a tack south. A nor'easter must have struck them hard on the Banks here and blowed them south past the Cape because they put into Rhode Island — Newport — Vineland they called it.

JERRY. Newport! The *Kentucky* was stationed there in —

MIKE (*bending forward*). Thin you've seen the tower?

JERRY. What tower?

MIKE. A low, round thing loike a Shannon grist mill. 'Twas the only mark they left.

JERRY. Thet so? I was thinkin' Christy Columbus was the first man to run out an anchor on this side.

MIKE. No, not at all. Them Danes was the firrst to do it — hundreds of years previous to the time he raised his two by twice West Indy Island —

JERRY. Did the Cyclopedy tell you why them Danes didn't put a notice in the papers when they got home?

MIKE. They were run under with all hands on the back trip. Whaleboats isn't Gloucester schooners.

[*A bell rings on deck — slowly and regularly.*

JERRY (*knocking out his pipe*). Hmmm! Must be foggin' down.

MIKE (*gazing reflectively at the ceiling*). I was thinking it was making for a snow.

JERRY. Snow is welcome. Keeps the deck from icin' up.

MIKE (*turning his head*). Labrador still snorin' over there?

JERRY (*getting up*). Yep.

MIKE. Man, he's a whale fer sleep. I been hearin' they

sleep for six months up in his country. D'you be thinkin' he's commencin'?

JERRY. He may be sleepin' ballast good parts of the time, but s'welp me! He's a cold-water pike. He'd rather bathe overboard in latitude forty-six than in a Parker House tub with hot'n cold comin'. He gits real offended if he ain't the one on the upset dory —

MIKE. Gaskell now ought to be ringing that bell a good trifle harder. Thim two in the dory was way off to the so'east last I was seein' of thim. The skipper gave them the new sets of lines. How many hooks were in that trawl — ?

JERRY. I had no chance to be countin' them.

MIKE. Luis and Evan been taking in the most this trip.

JERRY. That there Portugee Luis got eyes at night like a cat's. He's never been lost what I knows of — don't know 'bout Evan Riggs. He don't need to worry anyhow, with Luis with him in the dory — kinder queer for dory mates.

MIKE. As odd they be as a cod and a herring. I've shipped with Portugee folk before — but this hand Evan Riggs — sure — quaire — quaire. Where is his home port?

JERRY. Chatham on the Cape. He's been at fishin' most of his time. Halibutin' some, but out on the Banks here mostly.

[*Mike glances quickly again toward the hatchway, goes quickly to Jerry and touches his elbow. Jerry turns inquiringly.*

MIKE (*in a low intense voice*). He's seen somethin'.

JERRY (*awed*). Hey?

MIKE. Seen somethin' unholy on a night watch.

JERRY. Yeah, I recalls on the *Kentucky* a gunner's mate —

MIKE. He's seen somethin' and the terror is still carried in his eyes. I tell you, Kentucky, he's a Jonah.

JEPHTHA (*sitting up suddenly in his bunk*). Hey?

MIKE. So, it's you, Labrador? Is the *Colleen Bess* buckin' a bit too hard for you?

JEPHTHA. What was it thou tell to he?

MIKE. Oh, nothin' at all of grrand importance.

JEPHTHA (*crawling out*). Na? Na? Thou tell 'un somewhat about I. A hard name it was. I'm a hard man.

MIKE. And you come from a harrd country, you do.

JEPHTHA. You canna mean —

MIKE. Lord love us, Jephtha Pryd, can't a man be sayin' who is Jonah on this craft without playing Angel Gabriel to your sleeping corpse?

JEPHTHA (*glaring at him*). A Jonah, Mike Flaherty! And what? Was that 'un I?

MIKE. 'Twas Evan Riggs, I said, because of the wild look to him.

JEPHTHA (*stopping and shaking his head*). A-ah, Riggs. 'Tis a bad thing to call a man a Jonah.

MIKE (*clenching him by the shoulder*). Ay, but why is it we have so few kenches of fish in our hold with the cod runnin' wild and the rest of the fleet haulin' reg'lar? Why did we stove in two dories on the Georges, rip our trys'l, and why did we skelp a brig on the Virgin Bank? Why, have you iver asked yersel'? We got a Jonah aboard — and that Jonah is Riggs.

JEPHTHA (*muttering*). Ay, but it is a verra hard thing to call any man.

MIKE. *Shurre. Shurre.* But, Labrador, you go to-morrer and be askin' the crew of the *Sara Pratt*, the skipper of the *Josephine;* go and be askin' Sid Bailey in the *King Philip* — they all have sailed with the likes of him. They know about Evan. Have you been thinkin' why Gaskell has been stampin' the deck so riled up — frownin' in the log book each night after the rest of us have finished saltin' down? How much fish have we chalked in?

[*The hatch slides back and Lazarus, the colored cook, stumbles in. He is a short man, in overalls and sweater.*

JERRY. How's the weather makin', Lazarus?

LAZARUS. Comin' fo' to sto'm — an no'eastah — and de snow — Lo'd lub us dese Newfun'lun' latitudes am no

place fo' muh. No, *suh!* When I wuz stewa'din' on the United Fruit Company outer N'Awlins —

MIKE. Put yer helm up, Mobile. None of us can be sayin' this is a Caribbean picnic. 'Tis made of iron a man should be to go out winter trawlin'.

LAZARUS. I 'spect dat's the truf. Ah'm no man to do flirtin' with icebergs. No, sah!

MIKE. Do we eat reg'lar or just mug up to-night?

LAZARUS (*laying out bowls on the table*). Skippah tol' me to sto' yo' full.

JERRY. Huh! Double watches to-night.

MIKE. In the tracks of the sea-hoggin' liners, we are. I heard two steamers when I was out in the dory this day — off to windward they were — an' wallowin' like men-o'-war. Lord, they was makin' heavy weather!

JERRY. Wallowin'! The old *Kentucky* never —

JEPHTHA (*still brooding by his bunk*). 'Tis powe'fu' hard to call a man a Jonah.

LAZARUS (*turning from a locker by the companionway*). Who am a Jonah?

JERRY. Well, it ain't you, Lazarus. It's the red dory, it is.

LAZARUS (*turning back*). Lawdy, ah was feelin' it was baid luck to ship in a boat with only two horseshoes on her deckhouse —

MIKE (*sitting down on a bunk beside Jerry*). And mind ye, Jerry, ye should have sane Evan whin I told him the same yarn concernin' the Danes. He trimbled loike a sloop with a buoyed anchor, itchin' towards that ditty box which he won't be lettin' a soul see the insides of — and eyin' me all the while loike the mad cat o' Kilkenny —

[*There is a pounding on the hatch.*

A VOICE. Jephtha Pryd!

JERRY. It's yer wheel, Labrador.

JEPHTHA (*going up the companionway*). I'm a God-feerin' man. It's verra hard to call a man a name like that — Jonah —

[*He slides back the hatch. Snow whirls in and a tongue of*

sea water licks down the steps. Jephtha disappears and Gaskell steps in — a strong, middle-aged man. He closes the hatch.

JERRY. Be there the makin's of a sea, skipper?

GASKELL. Ay, she's raisin' fast. The fog will go but thar'll be snow comin'. Git some ballast below yer belts and we'll out and trip anchor.

MIKE. Is it close neighbors you're thinkin' we're goin' to have?

GASKELL. Ay-yuh.

MIKE. Shurre, it's pleasant loike to jog about in the race course of the prize hogs of the sea — damned steamers! . . . I been hearin' the *Betty* out o' Beverly was run under by one of 'em last week — nothin' was left floatin' at all but a broken locker cover with a corncob pipe stepped in the splinters. Shurre, it's foine bad luck you have lavin' yer pipe loose on deck.

JERRY (*cutting the cake from his pipe*). Yeah, tie off, Irish.

MIKE. Fog'n snow. One grrand night it is fer the makin' o' widders.

JERRY. Tie off, I tell yuh. Thar be Luis and Evan yit to come inboard, skipper.

GASKELL. That be why we're ridin' here. Fall to, boys. The deck has four inches of ice on it fer somebuddy to chop.

MIKE (*rising and stretching himself*). Yah, shurre sometimes, I'm thinkin' I'll disgrace meself and take to steam down Mexico waters with Lazarus here.

[*Lazarus has poured broth from one of his buckets into the bowls. The men draw up and hunch over the food.*

JERRY (*jigging a salt cracker in his palm*). Them two in the dory must be thinkin' they're at a church social. 'Tis four hours since I pushed 'em aout. Did you lash the wheel, skipper?

JEPHTHA (*bawling down the companionway*). Steamer — O-o-o-oh!

GASKELL (*jumping up*). Where away?

JEPHTHA. To the west so'west —

[*The thuttering roar of a foghorn sounds from above.*

JERRY (*throwing on his oilskin*). Broad on the sta'bud quarter, b'gosh — an' bearin' down!

GASKELL (*doing likewise*). Jerusalem, she's close! Jerry, you and Mike slash the gripes from the lee dories.

JERRY. Sounds as if she's goin' to work between us and them out there — yer trawl line's gone —

MIKE (*roaring*). If she don't walk over us! Damn these sea-goin' giraffes!

[*They are all on deck. The hatch stands open; the snow whirls in; the bell rings wildly; the great horn bursts again into a roar — much closer. Lazarus stands shaking by the companionway.*

LAZARUS (*mumbling terrifiedly*). Oh, Lawdy! Lawdy! She's a-comin' — she's a-comin'! No use — to wait, Lazarus — if she hits — she's gwine ter hit. She's gwine ter hit! (*He throws himself down on his knees and shouts*)

"Ah'm gwine ter meet the Lawd!
Ah'm gwine ter meet the Lawd!"

[*A great white light shoots down from a height, revealing Mike by the wheel.*

VOICE (*from above*). Schooner — under the port — bo-o-ow!

MIKE (*raising his fist and shouting*). A-ah! Sheer off! Sheer off! Sheer off, you damned sea-hogs! Hi-i-i-i! We'll git you in hell, you bat-eyed truck drivers! Sheer off! Put yer helm over, you damned hotel! That fer yer plate glass! (*He throws a belaying pin*) And that fer yer grand pianneys!

[*He throws another. There comes the rushing of mad waters, the thumping of a madly reversing screw; the light flashes by, a red light follows, then the winking of many portholes.*

MIKE (*bowing*). Thank you, kindly! Hope yer havin' a nice ball below — or charades mebbe. Hope the ladies ain't sick at all from gettin' their feeties wet! G'wan and git off the sea, you wheezin' Flatiron Building! You have no

call to come out in the wet, anyways! G'wan and bump an iceberg and leave us fishers alone — (*He comes down into the cabin*) Git off yer knees, Mobile. We'll be finishin' our soup now. (*He inhales his broth again*) Git off yer knees. You're not at yer own wake yit. The soup goes to us and not to the fishes.

LAZARUS. Gawd in hebben! She sho' scraped us clos'!

MIKE. She wanted to come walkin' through this cabin — but she yawed — the fish kettle veered for us. I was after throwin' things to make her do it. Belayin' pin went through the glass of her chart house. Man! 'Twas most worth a wreck to see the plate glass smash. I'm hopin' it took the navigatin' officer between his blind eyes. Mashed a liner's chart house! Glory be to God! It's a foine night's work! More soup, you black loafer.

LAZARUS. Yas, suh.

MIKE. It all comes o' these four 'n' five day to Europe locomotives thinkin' that the North Atlantic is their own pri'vut back yard. Shurre, now, where is the rest of this foine crew. Have they died o' fright or have they taken to fancy skatin' on the ice for'ard?

[*Gaskell comes a few steps down the companionway. He turns and assists a fair-haired man in oilskins whose mouth is squared with pain. A dark-faced Portuguese follows, supporting also. They put their burden down in the first bunk on the port side.*

MIKE. Praise be to heaven! The two of you are inboard. Did the liner skelp you, Evan?

[*The fair-haired man looks at him blankly.*

GASKELL. They war jest yellin' fer the toppin'-lift when the liner came by —

MIKE. Did it toss you out?

THE PORTUGUESE. Dory she go, pfff! What say — kindling wood. Me, I catch bobstay. Come over. Evan, he toss the odder way — so (*he bunts with his head*) into steamer.

JERRY (*who has followed*). And then I gaffed him and drawed him in.

MIKE. So ye bunted the liner, Chatham? I'm hopin' you stove it in. 'Tis a grrand night — one stove-in plate and one smashed chart house — to say nothin' of the mortality inside —

GASKELL. So that was the smash. I thought it wur our dishes breakin'. Hush, now, and stand by. Evan needs his head overhauled. He's been bleedin' scuppers full. Lazarus, in the medicine kit, fetch out number seven.

LAZARUS. Yas, suh.

MIKE. I'm after thinkin' it's worth a broken head, Chatham. I hit 'em in the eye and you punched him in the ribs — sure you didn't put a hole —

JERRY. Them liners be double-bottomed, you wild-thinkin' Irishman.

MIKE. Sure they're not takin' chances with the hard heads of us fishers.

JERRY. Pipe down. A liner's freeboard movin' at twenty knots and full o' rivets ain't a haymow. Chatham's bad hurt. What are you thinkin', Gaskell?

[*But Gaskell doesn't answer. He is looking down at Evan, who lies in his bunk, looking unblinkingly up at him. The Portugee hovers at the foot. Lazarus comes forward with a small bottle. Gaskell takes it and turns again to the Chatham man.*

MIKE (*after a pause*). Man! He's dazed by it or —

JERRY (*squatting on his own bunk*). I recalls on the *Kentucky* a corporal — Kennedy his name was — in the marines — he was leadin' a landin' party when we was down in Hayti — he was similar hit by a gun butt —

GASKELL. Psst! Now we won't bother him. His heart is bad. Give him more blankets — we won't be undressin' him. Be you wet, Luis?

LUIS. Na, capataz, ver' lit'. Wash of steamer caught me on bobstay here.

[*He raises his hands to his thighs.*

GASKELL. Wal, then, soak yer inside plankin' with coffee and y'll trim.

JERRY. Haow about a touch o' rum fer Chatham?

GASKELL. No. We'll be tryin' nothin' bad for Evan's heart. His head is sprung — an' a sprung head is wickeder 'n a sprung keel. Lazarus, you tumble up to the fresh-water butts — a full pail we'll need and a covered pan o' coals from the galley fire —

[*But Lazarus has not heard the command. His eyes roll. He leaps to his feet, grasping at the air with his hand.*

JERRY (*searching for his pipe*). Wal, Kennedy was fair brained by a nigger with a Mauser —

[*A voice comes from the Chatham man's bunk — a high-pitched, far-away voice.*

VOICE. By Odin, thou smitest well, Ottar Brightling —

MIKE (*in awe*). Mother o' Mary!

VOICE. That stroke sheared the horn from off mine helm. Doth aught come from a bench mate's strife?

JERRY. Eh? That ain't Chatham talkin' — (*Gaskell nods slowly*) Eh? That wa'n't his nat'ral v'ice?

VOICE. Skoal to thee, Ottar Brightling! One of my horn points falleth among the thwarts —

[*The stricken man rises in his bunk, the others instinctively step back.*

JERRY. Ain't he gone mad?

VOICE. But my head is shrouded in a cloak of bubbles. Skoal to thee, Ottar Brightling!

JERRY. Mebbe he's delirious —

VOICE. Thora waits 'neath my rooftree in Tenth land —

JERRY. Thora? Who's she? Chatham ain't got no wife.

MIKE. Whist! Whist!

VOICE. Skoal to thee, Ottar Brightling! Thou walkest on men's upraised shield-rims but my horn tip returns to Tenth land. I gaze up at thy face through a cloak of bubbles —

JERRY. What in hell is he talking about?

MIKE. Whist, I tell ye!

LAZARUS. It ain't him a-talkin'! It ain't him a-talkin'!

D'ere's a rusty do' dat's openin'— d'ere's a rusty do' dat's openin'!

MIKE. Now by the blessed Virgin —

LUIS. Terribilita! The soul of the sea is talkin' to sinners! Another candle! Another candle in the church of Santa Marta —

VOICE (*from the Chatham man*). Cold mists gather on thy high howe of stones, Thora. Thou sleepest in the long dark. Ottar Brightling has long lain stiff in his byrnie, athwart the scantling of his ship. He sleeps in the long dark in the shadow of the fjord — but our son holds aloft the horn tip, Thora — Like unto Like until — until — until mine helm returns — I gaze up at the blue through a cloak of bubbles —

[*Evan sinks back in his bunk. There is a long silence: the wind moans in the rigging.*

LUIS. Jesu! Jesu!

MIKE (*slowly*). I seen many a weird sight in the fens of Donegal but there be things at sea —

GASKELL. He's read it all.

JERRY. Mebbe it's that Encyclopedy o' yourn —

LAZARUS. Dere's a rusty do' dat's open. Dere's a rusty do' dat's open.

VOICE (*bursting out*). I come not back from Vineland, Thora, Vineland the good —

MIKE. Eh?

JERRY (*shaking*). I'm fer goin' on deck 'fore I die o' blue creevles.

[*He makes for the hatchway but stops.*

MIKE (*approaching the bunk*). Where lies Vineland, Evan Riggs?

VOICE (*from the prostrate Evan*). Riggs? Riggs? E-Riggs — to the left of the sun — to the left of the sun.

MIKE. And how by the wind?

VOICE. A broad white wake behind —

MIKE. Down the wind?

VOICE. A broad white wake runs past He holding the long

oar — the long oar — Thorfinn the Black steers with the long oar — the twilight sun shines on his sword arm —

MIKE. Hmm! Wind abeam and sailin' south — and what land were you raisin'?

GASKELL. Stop, you'll go no further'n that, Mike —

MIKE. 'Tis a great wonder I'm learnin' —

GASKELL. No, you'll not take advantage of the Almighty —

MIKE. I'm tellin' you it's a miracle!

GASKELL (*firmly*). You'll stop!

MIKE. I will go on! 'Tis the unknown I'm findin'!

GASKELL. No, I tell you! His mind's draggin' anchor. That be the Lord's doin' not ours, nor yourn to be tormentin' him.

MIKE. A-ah! Lave religion to lubbers ashore — here be somethin' — some unknown planet winkin' at us what the Almighty never knew —

GASKELL. And you be a Christian man —

MIKE. Ay, at times — but this is somethin' creepin' out of the hold of a man's mind — somethin' that has been hid down at the bottom —

GASKELL. Have you gone daft too?

[*Evan sits up in his bunk and then drops back again.*

LAZARUS. Closed — closed — it am closed.

MIKE. May the Lord give you a high seat in hell! We've lost it! It's gone!

GASKELL. You'll not be blasphemin' and you'll not sail with me agin.

MIKE. Sure, none of us will. The fish thimselves will not stay in the pens.

GASKELL. I'd be a fool to sign sech a passel of superstitious idiots agin. Did you never see a man delirious before? Naow turn to — we'll up-anchor and get under heads'ls; the water will boil like a lobster pot hereabouts on the shoals when the tide turns. Who took soundings?

JERRY. I did. Thirty fathom.

GASKELL. And the bottom?

JERRY. Sludge.

GASKELL. On deck then, and we'll pick up what trawl line the steamer didn't take away on her propeller. Wur all the hooks in the dory, Luis?

LUIS. Two out yet — one nex' schooner — line end tweest round knighthead —

GASKELL. Good! Stay tight and warm 'till yer watch and meantimes keep an eye on Riggs. If he gits vi'lent, we'll lash him down. Lazarus, git him a warmin' pan. Git it, this time.

[*They all go out, leaving Luis and Riggs. Luis pulls out a guitar from his bunk.*

LUIS. Luis, play nachette — eh, what? E-van, he troub' — ver' troub' in his head — Luis play — bimeby E-van foget his troub'. No say wild t'ing. He sleep lik' leetle babbee — va bene —

"'Tina innocente
'Tina roulercita"

I forget — you no understan' my talk — here is one I mak' up — one we sing when the cod run theeck —

Adown — adown to Flores
Portugee Joe he drop.
A schooner fin' he walk upon
A t'ousand quintal den he had —

For he was capataz,
Capataz was Fisher Joe.

Adown — adown to Flores —
Capataz was Fisher Joe.

Adown — adown to Flores
Portugee Joe he drop
Fin' gel long look out to sea
A white casa gleam through orange tree

For he was capataz,
Capataz was fisher Joe.

Adown — adown to Flores —
Capataz was Fisher Joe.

How you lik' dat? Ver' fine — eh, what? Bimeby Luis he drop down to Flores with a beeg ship and he sail in Morro Grande, where he see a leetle white casa through de trees — an' dere one lettle gel she wait for Luis — mebbe — mebbe not — mebbe she marry ay fin' man — a caballero from Fayal — ah va bene — de gel she ebb and flow lik' tide — no like to stand long watch — a-ah va bene —

"'Tina innocente
'Tina roulercita — "

(*He breaks off with a sudden twanging chord, looking fixedly at Riggs*) Eh, wh-a-at?

[*He touches Riggs' eyelids and then looks at him a long time. Silently he goes to his own bunk, brings out two candles and places them on the bunk shelf above Riggs' head. Then he lights them; crosses himself; and kneels by the bunk.*

Jerry stumbles down the steps.

JERRY. Swipe me, what do you cal'c'late this is?

JEPHTHA (*following*). I dinna say. I dinna care. You be curious 'bout nothing at all.

[*Jerry holds up a round black weedy object, seaweeded and barnacled with a long hook rising from it.*

JERRY. Queer thing to be hookin' up from the sea.

JEPHTHA (*tapping it*). It is man make.

JERRY. It be iron — a small try-pot thrown over from a whaler — or a dipper from the first side-wheeler.

JEPHTHA. How is't wi' sick 'un?

[*They turn and see Luis kneeling there.*

JERRY. Lordy, is he gone?

[*Jephtha approaches and feels Riggs' heart. Luis rises and nods to their apparent questioning.*

JEPHTHA. May his soul rest in peace.

[*Mike comes down the companionway, sees what has happened, crosses himself and walks to the table, and curiously*

examines Jerry's find, which forms little puddles on the boards. Lazarus comes in with the pan of coals.

MIKE. He'll not be needin' fire now.

LAZARUS. What's dat?

MIKE (*fingering the object*). Come off the last hook of the trawl. Come off the last hook of the trawl — and that hook was the only one not hauled in the dory when the liner hit him — ah, it's a near touch we have in some things — a-ah — ah —

[*He keens softly to himself.*

GASKELL (*from the hatchway*). What's this dawdlin' about? On deck here. Because a man takes a fit, d'you make trawlin' a quiltin' bee? Turn to! Turn to!

[*They don't reply. Gaskell comes down and feels the heart — the pulse —*

JERRY (*breathlessly*). Here be a mirror, skipper. Take his breath. We buried a man off the *Pequot* once — lashed his hands at his sides — a Frenchman hooked him up stale a week later — the Frenchy swore on the book he found the hands clenched over the face. (*Gaskell takes the mirror and holds it over the nose and mouth, looks at the glass, then shakes his head.*)

GASKELL (*in a low voice*). We'll bury him now.

LUIS. No. No!

GASKELL. I lost my ship once and rowed for three days looking into the frozen eyes of my dory mate — we'll not hold the dead aboard. Jephtha, fetch that bit of a try's'l ripped off on the Georges — (*Jephtha goes up the steps*) Hold there. What are you doin', Mike?

MIKE. Shurre, I'm goin' to take a look at his ditty box. There is a bit still hid —

GASKELL. Has Riggs any relatives — any kin at all?

JERRY. No — not that I know about.

LUIS. He no speek 'bout dem.

MIKE. The loike bein' the case, his goods go fer auction —

JERRY. Might wait till he's overside —

MIKE. Clothes — mighty little of them — dungarees —

jersey — slip-ons — tobacco — a picture of himself — Atlantic Avenoo photographer — a shore-goin' necktie and hat — here — (*he unwraps an old Bible and sits and studies the flyleaf, puzzled. He stoops and digs out another wrapped parcel. A small horn, yellow with age, tumbles out. He seizes it and holds it aloft, studying it closely. Speaks almost to himself*) Thora lies 'neath a howe in Tenth land — our son has the horn tip —

LAZARUS (*in a low breath*). Dat am it. Dat am it.

MIKE. Hmm, a vessel's course. Step here. What do you make o' that, Jerry?

JERRY. A chimney.

MIKE. More like a Shannon grist mill. I'm thinkin' — mark the ship's course?

JERRY. What ship? The *Sarah Pratt?*

[*Mike looks at him, and without answering swings off to the Bible again.*

MIKE. 'Tis the family Bible — and the family tree inside — and they were great for changin' their names — readin' from the bottom up — Riggs — Ricks — Rickerson — Rixson — Erickson — (*he pauses*) then some furrin' language same as on the horn.

GASKELL. Sounds like ye're workin' algebray. Is't somethin' of a new country you've discovered?

MIKE. Ay, a new country.

[*Jephtha comes in with the sailcloth. He spreads it on the table. Silently, they take Riggs' body from the bunk and lay him on the cloth. Mike puts the Bible on his breast and starts to lay the horn also, but on second thought holds it back.*

GASKELL. 'Tis best. 'Tis a heathen thing.

[*They fold the arms over the Bible, raise the edges of the sail and quickly twine the rope about it.*

GASKELL. Who will say a prayer?

[*They are all silent.*

JEPHTHA. 'Tis I will say it. We, thy friends, Evan Riggs, lay thee upon the bosom of the waters. May ye lie in peace and quiet till the last great trumpet blows and the

sea giveth up her dead. . . . "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

[*Without another word they take the rope and tighten it — they stoop and lift and move up the steps of the companionway. Mike and Lazarus linger.*

Lazarus takes the lighted candle from the bunk shelf, places it on a short board, adds a pinch of flour and water.

LAZARUS. Jes' to set his soul free. May she be a-ridin' free.

MIKE (*looking at the horn*). Shurre the book said, ivery other generation lost at sea — Evan Rickson off Hatt'tras, John Rickerson off the Georges, Tom Ricks off Block Island, and now — Evan Riggs off Newfoundland. What was it he said. . . . Like unto Like until his helm returns— Like unto Like until — shurre 'tis queer things happen — queer things on the sea.

[*He lays down the horn.*

LAZARUS. Yas, suh. Yas, suh. Yas.

[*They go up the steps and close the hatchway. The cabin lamp grows dim; the light flickers and goes out. There remains darkness and the moaning of the wind.*

A dull light commences to glow in the dark there — a phosphorescent green. It grows brighter until we can make out a figure in armor. A huge figure in a green-glowing byrnie. A face with a full, martial beard with great hollow eyes staring forth above. The figure moves to the table, takes the yellow horn and fits it to the dripping object brought recently from the sea's depths. This is lifted and placed on the seaweed-matted head. — We see — it wears a horned helmet.

The figure nods slowly and disappears into darkness.

The wind howls unceasingly.

CURTAIN

THE GOLD CIRCLE
THREE WISHES

THOMAS WOOD STEVENS

Thomas Wood Stevens was born in Illinois, in 1880. He studied at Armour Institute under the erroneous impression that he was to be an engineer. He was for some years head of the Department of Illustration in the Chicago Art Institute; painted (briefly) under Brangwyn and Sorolla; and was associated with Donald Robertson's two seasons at the Art Institute (1908–1909). Since 1914 he has been head of the Department of the Drama, Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pittsburgh, where he has made scores of productions of all sorts of plays.

He is the author of many plays and pageants, the more prominent of which are "St. Louis", produced in conjunction with Percy Mackaye's masque; "Newark", 1916; "The National Red Cross Pageant", 1917; "Joan of Arc", at Domremy, France, 1918; and recently the community drama "Missouri", for St. Louis, and the "Pageant of Virginia", for Richmond.

THE GOLD CIRCLE

A FANTASTIC PLAY

By THOMAS WOOD STEVENS

Characters

The Overseer of the Pool
The Greek
The Slave with the Green Shirt
The Merchant
The Wazir
The Emperor
Slaves of the pool; the Merchant's camel drivers; the Wazir's men; the Emperor's retinue

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Applications for permission to present "The Gold Circle" should be addressed to Norman Lee Swartout, Summit, N. J. No performance may take place without his consent.

THE GOLD CIRCLE

A group of Oriental slaves are washing for gold in a pool at the foot of a cliff. They are superintended by an Overseer, who has a long whip. Above, on the edge of the cliff, another slave, the Greek, sits, kicking his heels and swinging a stone hammer idly in his hands. The Overseer takes from the gold washers one by one the grains of gold that are left in the pans. The Greek has left his pan unwashed, and when the Overseer comes to it, he looks up for the runaway; seeing him above, he calls out to him.

OVERSEER. Idle and good-for-nothing! Come back to your basin.

THE GREEK. Patience, good Master. I am tired of spinning the gravel in a basin to find so little dust of gold at the bottom.

OVERSEER. It is not for you to reckon the gold in the basin.

THE GREEK. It is needful that some one reckon it, lest we waste our labor.

OVERSEER. The labor of laying my whip to your back will not be wasted.

THE GREEK. Again you mistake, Master.

OVERSEER (*losing his temper*). Come down at once. I'll wait no longer.

THE GREEK. And I, Master —

OVERSEER. Come down, I have said —

THE GREEK. Not so hasty, Master, I pray you. It is you I am thinking of and of the gold. Listen, now. It is only the dust that the rains have washed down into the pools and the streams, but in the faces of the cliffs the gold must be at home. Where you find in the pool a wandering grain, in the cliffs there will be whole cities of gold, treasures of the earth gods that have run away. Look you now.

[*He slings his hammer and a mass of gravel and earth falls*

down the face of the cliff at his feet. In the mass is a sudden gleam of a great nugget of gold. Both the Greek and the Overseer see it. The Overseer is for a moment taken aback, as if suspecting some trick, but the Greek leaps down after it and picks it up, holding it to the light. Instantly the Overseer comes over to him, his whip ready.

What did I tell you, Master?

OVERSEER. It is a lump of marvel, a king's treasure. Give it to me.

THE GREEK. Not so hasty, Master. You like better the dust from the slow washing in the basins.

OVERSEER. Give it to me.

THE GREEK. Not so hasty, Master. You commanded me to wash the dust, but I thought better to strike upon the cliff and ask what the earth gods had left there for me. Behold, they have answered. This gold is mine.

OVERSEER (*threatening with the whip*). Shall a slave have treasure? Shall a beast have that which belongs of right to the rich and great of the earth?

THE GREEK. Hold, now. Slave I may be, for slaves may be wise, but beast — doth a beast take thought, and by taking thought find more than these washers search out in the circle of a year? I have taken thought, Master. Put away that whip. I am thy slave no longer. With this gold I shall buy my freedom, and it may be a tall ship that I may sail home in splendor.

OVERSEER. I'll bring your dreams to nothing. Hold, slaves! Set on him.

[*The Greek stands idly swinging his stone hammer, the nugget in his left hand. The Overseer stands off out of reach of the hammer, swinging his whip. Slaves drop their basins and circle around the two.*

THE GREEK. Will you listen to him with the whip, my brothers, when I have a treasure that would buy you all your freedom?

OVERSEER. They will listen, knowing that my whip will keep its promise, and that your tongue will cheat them in

the end. List, ye slaves; to him who takes the lump of gold from this Greek, I will give his freedom. Set upon him.

[*The slaves close in around the Greek, who swings his hammer over their heads.*

THE GREEK. Now do I know ye to be slaves, indeed. . . .

[*From behind him one of the slaves throws his basin against the Greek's legs, and from in front, another casts a basin of water into his face. He is blinded for the moment and staggers. The slaves close in upon him and secure the nugget. It passes from hand to hand among them, as they clutch it one from another. The last one to get it brings it to the Overseer.*

THE SLAVE WITH THE GREEN SHIRT. It was I, Master. Now give me my freedom.

OVERSEER. How do I know it was you that took it? They were all upon him.

THE GREEK (*brushing off the dust of the encounter*). Look now for his promise, slaves, — slaves of folly!

THE SLAVE WITH THE GREEN SHIRT. It was I, Master, I who took it.

[*All the other slaves immediately set up a great shout and set upon the one with the green shirt. The Greek goes off up the slope at the back, watching the struggle. While the uproar is at its height, a Merchant with his followers, servants, and camel drivers enter. The Merchant sees what is happening and comes down among the combatants.*

THE MERCHANT. Be silent. What do ye here?

OVERSEER. Worthy and Excellent Master, these are my slaves, gold washers of the pool.

THE MERCHANT. Your slaves, forsooth! Why then is this uproar? Why do you not keep them quietly at their task?

THE SLAVE WITH THE GREEN SHIRT. Worthy and Excellent Sir, at my master's word I took this treasure from yonder thief. He promised me my freedom.

[*The other slaves set up a shout to drown him out.*

THE MERCHANT. Be silent. (*Turning to the Overseer*) If you have promised this man his freedom, why do you now deny him?

OVERSEER. I promised freedom to him who took the great lump of gold from yonder thief, but I do not know if it be this man.

THE MERCHANT. Let me see the lump of gold.

THE SLAVE WITH THE GREEN SHIRT. Behold, here it is, great and Worshipful Sir.

THE MERCHANT. I doubt greatly if this be gold.

THE SLAVE AND THE OVERSEER (*together*). Truly it is gold, Worshipful Sir.

THE MERCHANT. Let me weigh it in my hand.

[*The Slave with the Green Shirt hands the nugget to the Merchant, who weighs it thoughtfully, looking from one to the other.*

THE MERCHANT. I see that here there is need of a magistrate, and as none is likely to come to this pool beside the highway, I will take it upon myself to judge. (*To the Overseer*) It is plain that you have promised to some man his freedom, and have not kept your word. For this, I will have you bastinadoed.

OVERSEER. Worshipful Sir, I beseech you —

THE MERCHANT. Be silent. (*To his camel drivers*) Take him aside and let him be well beaten upon the soles of his feet. (*Turning to the gold washers*) As for you, slaves, it is plain you have conspired among you to set free one of your number, although he little deserves his freedom.

[*The slaves cry out together, denying that they have conspired.*

Whosoever among you cries out, I will take to be the most guilty, and my punishment shall begin upon him.

[*The slaves are silent and downcast.*

If there be not among you a first conspirator, I will pardon you all. Go back to your basins and set to work again.

THE SLAVE WITH THE GREEN SHIRT. Worshipful Sir, we go back to the gold washing. Yet suffer us with all respect to ask, Worshipful Sir, what is to become of our lump of gold?

THE MERCHANT. I begin to suspect that you are the guilty one. Do you also desire punishment?

[*As he speaks the cries of the Overseer under the bastinado are heard and the Slave with the Green Shirt runs quickly to his basin. As he does so, from the opposite side to that by which the Merchant entered, the Wazir appears with his company.*

THE WAZIR. Hold! Why is this man given the bastinado?

THE MERCHANT (*with a deep salaam before the Wazir*). August Highness, I have ordered this man's punishment because he hath falsely deluded his people, and hath failed to make good his word to them. As you know, August Highness, we merchants must defend the honor of a man's word, lest all our commerce be tainted with deceit, and the land run wholly to lying and falsehood.

THE WAZIR. Is it so? You have taken upon yourself to hear this case, yet you are not a magistrate.

THE MERCHANT. I stood in the place of one having authority under the law because this pool by the highway was a lonely spot, and I looked for no magistrate to pass.

THE WAZIR. You take too much upon yourself. Let me hear the case of the man who was beaten.

[*The camel drivers bring forward the Overseer, who comes limping and salaams before the Wazir.*

OVERSEER. Worshipful and August Excellency, the words of your mouth drop wisdom and in your hand is justice. This merchant came upon us in contention, but it was no more as he told you than the snows of the Himalayas are of ebony.

THE WAZIR. Now is the case regularly come before me for judgment, since it is clear that one of these two speaks falsely, and it is more than likely that both have lied as darkly as Egyptians. (*Turning to the Merchant*) Speak you now —

THE MERCHANT (*interrupting*). Excellent and August Highness, I have no wish to be a judge, nor to act further in this case. I will leave to you the punishment of the man and go upon my way, rejoicing in your wisdom.

[*He turns away.*

THE OVERSEER. Mighty and Worshipful One, I pray you that

this merchant be stopped, for he is carrying with him my treasure, my lump of gold that was to have bought freedom for all my people.

THE WAZIR (*to the Merchant*). Stand now! I have not yet given judgment. Where is the lump of gold?

THE MERCHANT. The case, Worshipful One, concerned the matter of a promise of freedom to a slave. There was no gold, unless this fellow has some dust of it taken from the basins of his slaves.

[*The Slave with the Green Shirt and the Overseer both protest violently, crying: "There was a great lump of gold. He has it." "The Merchant is a thief." The other slaves take up their cries.*

THE WAZIR. Be still. (*To the Merchant*) Do you think it best to deliver the gold to me with dignity or to let me find it through the shredded rags that will no longer cover you, when my people have done beating you?

THE MERCHANT. The wisdom of your August Highness is, indeed, beyond man's wisdom.

[*He produces the nugget and hands it to the Wazir.*

THE WAZIR. That is better. The case is now simpler than it was, and we shall see justice done more quickly.

THE MERCHANT. I pray you, Worshipful One, let me take my leave, since I have no further dealings in this matter.

THE WAZIR. Indeed, have you not? Do you expect me to believe that you give up this treasure so easily? It is not in the blood of men or of merchants to be so generous where gold is concerned. Whither go you?

THE MERCHANT. Again I applaud the wisdom of your August and Worshipful Highness. Know then: I go from here to lay my case before the Emperor, knowing that however high be thy seat, he will do me justice, and that my treasure, which thou hast taken away from me, will be restored through his word.

THE WAZIR. Go, then. I will not stay you.

OVERSEER. August and Worshipful One, humbly I pray you

that my treasure, the foolish little lump of gold, be restored to me.

THE WAZIR (*weighing the gold in his hands*). You do not value it justly. I cannot let it remain in your hands, lest some thief should take it from you, and a great and good gift of the earth be wasted.

[*The Overseer throws himself on the ground at the Wazir's feet, and as he does so the Emperor and his suite enter. The Emperor is carried in a great chair, and before him, also carried on the backs of men, goes the Emperor's principal god. As the Emperor is brought on, all prostrate themselves except the Wazir, who bows very low before him. The Emperor makes a sign that his litter is to be set down, and calls the Wazir to him.*

THE EMPEROR. This is a strange matter. What make you, Grand Wazir, here by the roadside?

THE WAZIR. Sire, the burden of your justice is ever upon me. Humbly here by the wayside I have been hearing a case in accordance with your laws.

THE EMPEROR. What manner of case, Grand Wazir? It is not like you to delay my business at the expense of slaves and camel drivers.

THE WAZIR. I delayed but a moment, Sire, and the case was not worthy of your celestial notice.

THE EMPEROR. Let me judge of that.

THE WAZIR. It was a matter of a promise made to a slave, and the impudence of a merchant setting himself up to do justice.

THE MERCHANT (*throwing himself down before the Emperor*). Mighty and Celestial Lord, I pray you in the name of the gods, do unto me, with your own sublime hands, justice. The case is not as this great Wazir has reported it.

THE OVERSEER (*throwing himself down on the other side*). Mighty Sire, though I be but a slave, and dazzled by thy countenance as by the sun, I pray thee, do me also justice. These two are thieves, both of them, the Merchant and the Wazir. They have stolen my treasure of gold.

THE EMPEROR. Thy treasure of gold. Does a slave sue for the possession of a treasure of gold?

THE MERCHANT. It was not his treasure, Celestial Sire, but one recovered from a thief who is fled.

THE WAZIR. You see, Sire, how difficult is your justice among men who have not the truth in them. As your celestial wisdom discerned, how could this slave possess a golden treasure? And this thieving merchant — should he deal out punishment in the name of thy law?

THE EMPEROR. This is a strange case, truly, but I may yet come to fathom it; and first let me see this treasure.

[*The Merchant and the Overseer both rise, pointing to the Wazir and crying: "He has it. The Wazir. He took it from us." The Emperor fixes the Wazir with his gaze.*

Let me see this treasure.

[*The Wazir, with a deep salaam, places the lump of gold in the Emperor's hand.*

This clears the matter greatly. It is plain to me that so goodly a lump of gold could never belong to this man, who is but an overseer of slaves; and this merchant surely should not have it, lest thieves be tempted to slay him for it and so he lose his life; and in the hand of the Wazir of my kingdom it would be a very present urge to pride and insurrection. No, my children, a great lump of gold, such as this, is meant only for the treasure of an emperor, since he alone may use it wisely. A lump of gold like this — a thousand maidens dancing in the light of torches — the tread of ten thousand marching men — the light in the eye of the Emperor's greatest of gods. — Hear you now my judgment. Set down the Holy One that I may pray, even here by the roadside; and first let mine artificers beat out this lump of gold for a crown for the brow of the god, that he may hear my prayers. I wait.

[*The Emperor's throne is set at the side of the road. Rich rugs are laid before it, and he descends, seating himself on the ground. Music sounds and a group of dancers come before him. To the beat of the dancers' music, the artificers*

hammer out the lump of gold into a circle, and when the dance is finished the chief artificer brings it, bows to the Wazir, who presents it to the Emperor. The Emperor now steps forward, facing the god, holding the circlet before him.

Let all give place. Let all ears be stopped and eyes be blinded, for my prayer is between myself and the greatest of our gods, inviolate.

[*The Emperor's people all retire to a distance, and the Emperor approaches the god; as the others retire, the Greek slave, the original finder of the nugget, conceals himself behind the image of the god.*

[*The Emperor lays the circlet on the knees of the god, salaams, and still kneeling speaks his prayer.*

Bright and Mysterious One, Lord of the Destiny of the land, and of the blood of its kings, to thee I make again my prayer; again this offering of heavy gold. Hear me, Holy and Mysterious Master of Life. I go to lead down upon the plains of the world mine armies. Give me to triumph over mine enemies that I may lay at thy feet the lordship of the world. Be mine enemies thine also, and I will build for thee out of their lives a temple of skulls, higher than the palace thou hast granted me; and across thy path and mine shall flow a river of hostile blood, smoking beneath the moon; and at the end of that river I shall find a crown of earth's dominion, beside which this crown I offer is as yonder pool to the ocean that flows around the world. Bright and Shining One, I bow my head before thee, waiting, waiting thy sign.

[*The Emperor bows his head, and as he does so, the Greek steals out from behind the god, stabs him, seizes the circlet of gold, and conceals himself inside the hollow image. There is a pause, then the Wazir ventures forward. He comes close to the Emperor's body, and seeing that he is dead, stops suddenly; he is about to give the alarm, but on second thought postpones it until he has made search for the gold; finding that it is gone, he cries out, prostrating himself before the image.*

THE WAZIR. Spare me. Spare us all, Great and Terrible One. Spare me from this and I will feed Thee with gold forever. (*He goes back to the center and cries out*) Lament, bow down and weep, all ye people, for the Lord of the Land, the Lord of the World is dead.

[*To the wailing of the people, the bearers of the image take up their burden; and the dead Emperor in his litter, with all his train, moves off along the roadway.*

CURTAIN

THREE WISHES

A COMEDY

By THOMAS WOOD STEVENS

Characters

CARNEY
BUCKS
SIMPERSON
JIM
LIEUTENANT

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THREE WISHES

SCENE. *An army billet somewhere in France. Carney, Bucks, and Simperson, Privates, are playing poker; from time to time Jim, the Shine, ministers to their wants. As the curtain rises, Carney, who already holds most of the matches (or beans, as the case permits), is looking over his hand confidently; Simperson's expression is judically immobile, Bucks', openly disconsolate. On the draw, the expressions change; Bucks brightens, and Carney looks serious. Betting, Bucks puts up half his remaining pile. Simperson, who is dealing, passes, and Carney raises Bucks.*

CARNEY. I hate seeing you so reckless, Bucks.

BUCKS (*in a slow, Southern voice*). Yes, you do.

CARNEY. Well, I do. I hoped this game would last out the evening. But the evenings are so plaguey long, and you and Simp are so damn reckless —

BUCKS. There's the rest of my pile. I got a hand this time. [*Carney covers the bet.*

CARNEY. Lay 'em down. (*The cards are laid on the table*) They're all mine.

[*He reaches out and gathers in the winnings.*

BUCKS. Well, would you believe it? Three aces looked mighty good to me.

CARNEY. *Très bien* — what next? You, Simperson.

SIMPERSON (*shaking his head slowly*). Out of court.

CARNEY. Come up, Bucks — come up.

BUCKS. No good talking to me. Three aces, too.

CARNEY (*to Jim*). Jim. Jim, what can you find for a guy that seems to have cleaned out the place?

JIM. More of the same, I reckon.

CARNEY. That all?

JIM. That's all, boss.

BUCKS (*still studying the three aces*). I know now what did it to me. I touched Jim with my left hand.

SIMPERSON. What are you mystifying about, Bucks? You touched Jim with your left hand?

BUCKS. It's bad luck to touch a darkey with your left hand, when you're playing poker. I knew it was bad luck, but I'd forgotten that I did it. I never would have put up my last centime on those aces if I'd remembered.

CARNEY. Jim, what's this he's growling about?

JIM. Luck, Mister Carney. He hain't got no such luck as you, but he knows all about it. He's dead right, too.

SIMPERSON. What do you mean — he's dead right?

JIM. About touching a colored person with your left hand.

BUCKS. No use trying to explain it to you, Simp. But it's true. Jim knows more about luck than you'll ever learn. He's one of those boys — but it's no use talking to you. You wouldn't get it.

SIMPERSON. What sort of a fool hocus-pocus are you putting up, anyway?

BUCKS. I tell you, you wouldn't understand it.

SIMPERSON. Well, I've watched what Carney did to you, and I don't want to understand it. It's no good, that's plain. But I'd like to know what you're talking about.

BUCKS. All right. Jim, come here.

CARNEY (*clearing for a new game*). New game — new bank.

BUCKS. It's no game. Do you think I'd sit in a game with Jim? I just want to show you something. Jim, have you got any bones in your pocket?

JIM. What do you want to know for, Mr. Bucks?

BUCKS. Show these gentlemen what you can do, Jim.

JIM. Go 'long with you, Mister Bucks.

BUCKS. Look here, you black shine — haven't I lost twenty francs on your account tonight? Dig up those bones. (*Jim fumbles in his pockets; for a moment it appears that the bones are lost, but at last he produces two*) Make it three, boy. (*Jim looks up protestingly, but Bucks insists;*

the third dice comes out, Jim grinning and shaking his head) Now show the gentlemen what you can do. They don't believe in luck — in — you know what I mean, Jim.

[*Jim rolls the dice tentatively on the table.*

JIM. She's working strong tonight, Mister Bucks.

CARNEY. Come along! What's the confidential?

SIMPERSON. Give us your demonstration, Louisiana.

JIM. I wants three sixes. I wants three sixes.

[*He rolls the dice. The others look on carelessly, then with sudden interest.*

CARNEY. Got 'em, by Heck!

SIMPERSON. Let me look at those dice. (*He examines them carefully, testing and rolling them*) Can you do it again?

JIM. I wants three sixes. I wants three sixes. (*He rolls them; the others look in amazement at the throw*) She's workin' mighty strong to-night.

CARNEY. Now wouldn't that crimp you?

SIMPERSON. That's a remarkable throw. Do you know how many thousand chances there are against repeating a throw of three faces? By the laws of chance —

BUCKS. You may know something about the laws of the land, back in the States, Simp, but you don't know anything about the real laws of chance. Jim does; they all do.

JIM. They ain't many that can do as much as what I can, when she's workin' strong, boss.

SIMPERSON. I believe you're right, Jim. Anybody that can just call for one throw in fifty thousand, and get it —

[*Carney shuffles the cards.*

CARNEY. Play some more, boys?

SIMPERSON. I'm flat, Carney — and so's Bucks. You might play a hand with Jim.

JIM. I'm willin', boss. I'm good to-night.

CARNEY. I guess not, Shine.

SIMPERSON. Wise work, sonny.

CARNEY. What's the use anyway? I win a lot of this crinkley stuff, and there's nothing in this man's country to do with it after you get it. If it were real, honest-to-God

United States money now — and a man could go along Broadway —

SIMPERSON. Shut up about money, and all the rest of that, Carney. I've had enough of it. Besides —

CARNEY. Well —

SIMPERSON. Look here, Jim, I want to know —

JIM. Laws, boss, if you want to know how to get her workin' strong, I can't tell you nothin'. You have to feel when it's so, and there's few white folks — mighty few —

CARNEY. Yes, and there's few white men that could lick Jack Johnson. But what of it? *Pas de quoi.* Most of us don't want to try.

SIMPERSON. Don't butt in, Carney. What about it, Jim? I'm strong for this stuff. Three sixes twice, just by saying the words —

JIM. There's lots of words I could say, Mister Simperson —

BUCKS. I advise you not to start anything, Simp.

CARNEY. Oh, come now, Buckie. That's what we came for — to start something. You talk like the new Lieutenant—

SIMPERSON. Now, Jim, what do you mean — words you could say?

JIM. Did you gentlemen — I ain't preferrin' the question to Mr. Bucks now, you understand — did you gentlemen ever hear of a Virgo Doctor?

SIMPERSON. I've heard of a Voodoo, if that's what you mean.

JIM. Some folks call 'em that, but 'tain't the right name. Right name's Virgo Doctor. They're the people what can get her goin' strong, now and again.

SIMPERSON. Now look here, Jim. I'm broke, but I'm good for ten francs on this, if you can pull something special.

JIM. I wouldn't do it for money, nohow. And I wouldn't like to get you gentlemen in bad with no officers —

SIMPERSON. You won't. Bucks and I are safe, and nothing you can do would put Carney in worse with the new Lieutenant —

CARNEY. For the love of Heaven, Simp, let me forget him for a minute —

SIMPERSON. Go to it, Jim.

BUCKS. Now understand, fellows — I'm not in on this.

SIMPERSON. All right. Bucks is out. Now, Jim.

JIM. I'll take this tablecloth, if you don't mind. (*He drapes the table cover around him, and takes up the candle*) And I'll put out the light. (*He pauses*) You — you won't forget about them ten francs, Mister Simperson? (*Simperson nods. Jim stands for a moment looking straight before him; then he blows out the candle and begins a sing-song chant*)

Are you there — are you near me — are you close in the dark, in the air? Are you there?

I's a-callin' — I's a-callin' — I's a-callin'.

Can you hear me? I's a-callin'. Are you near me? I's a-callin'.

If you're near me are you touchin' me? Am I touchin' you?

For I'm puttin' out my hand — I'm puttin' out all my fingers — I'm puttin' out my fingers in the dark toward you.

For the power of the darkness — for the Virgo of the night I'm stretchin' out my hand.

I'm reachin' out my hand and I'm sayin' in my heart all the words I got to say — all the words I got to say, in my heart.

Do you put your hand in mine? Do you leave me cryin' lone in the night?

Now I feel the breath — now I feel the breath — now I touch the hidden hand. Now the ring is on my finger. Now the river's flowing over me — flowin' over me. Now I's come to Virgo — now I's still again — now I's still.

I's touchin' for luck on his left shoulder, for the wish that must be fulfill'. Now I's touchin' on the right shoulder

for the second wish. Now I's touchin' on his head — on his head for the third wish.

Virgo — Virgo — Virgo, now I's touched him —Virgo, listen —

Virgo, listen—Virgo, listen till he calls you!

(*At the words, he has touched Carney on the shoulders and on the head. There is a pause as he finished the chant; then he twitches off the tablecloth, dropping on his knees by the table, and covers his face in his hands, crying out*) Light the light! For the Lord's sake, light the light!

SIMPERSON (*in a hushed voice*). What does that mean, Bucks?

BUCKS (*lighting the candle*). I don't know. He touched Carney for three wishes.

SIMPERSON. What was all that, Jim?

JIM. Don't ask me, Mister Simperson — don't ask me.

SIMPERSON. Does it mean that Carney gets his wish, three times?

JIM. Mebbe so, but don't ask me. Lord forgive me — don't ask me. I never did feel her workin' so strong.

SIMPERSON. Try it, Carney. What do you wish?

CARNEY. You know well enough what I wish.

SIMPERSON. Don't say you want to go home.

CARNEY. Oh, I don't camouflage it. I've been a private ever since I joined the army — with no chance at all. I wish the same thing every day I get up in the morning.

SIMPERSON. I get you.

BUCKS. Well, you don't behave like it.

CARNEY. I've lost patience, that's all. I wish I was out of the ranks — anyway, at all, but out of the ranks. (*There is the commotion of men coming to attention outside, and a voice is heard inquiring for Carney*) Hang it all, it's the new Lieutenant.

[*Enter the Lieutenant. The men scramble to their feet.*

THE LIEUTENANT. Carney.

CARNEY. Yes, sir.

THE LIEUTENANT. You have some knowledge of French?

CARNEY. A little, sir.

THE LIEUTENANT. So the Major said. He had only your word for it, I believe, but he is making you a sergeant, and detailing you specially. Your warrant is waiting at headquarters. You are to take a squad at once and go out after horses. You will cover the towns and villages listed here, starting from the village of Dubois-sur-Côte. A motor truck is moving immediately. Get your stuff and be ready. You will be the only man in the detail who speaks French, and you will be expected to buy horses to the best possible advantage, picking them up wherever you can find them. Report back to Dubois-sur-Côte in five days.

CARNEY. You say we start to-night, sir?

THE LIEUTENANT. At once. I've been a long time locating you, so I advise that you report to the Major immediately. You know where the camion starts?

CARNEY. Yes, sir.

THE LIEUTENANT. And you know where Dubois-sur-Côte is?

CARNEY. I'll find it, sir.

THE LIEUTENANT. Very good. I may tell you frankly, Carney, the Major has confidence in you. More than I have, I'm afraid. You have everything?

CARNEY. Yes, sir.

THE LIEUTENANT. Good night.

[*The Lieutenant goes out, leaving Carney staring at his movement order.*

CARNEY (*reading*). Sergeant Carney and eight men.

SIMPERSON. Well, I'll be damned! Jim, I owe you ten francs.

BUCKS. Don't take it too seriously, Simp.

SIMPERSON. Well, it's mighty weird, just the same.

CARNEY. Weird — I should say weird. The truck's waiting in the rain, and me off for five days with a squad that knows I've just been raised, trying to buy horses from Frenchies on what French I know. Weird — it's looney, to put it mild.

SIMPERSON. But you said you wished —

CARNEY. Yes, I said I wished — and at that very moment the Lieutenant was stalling around with his instructions, pretending to try to locate me. It was all decided before we started the game to-night. I've seen the Major have his eye on me a lot lately. It's just coincidence — but I'm the victim. And it all comes of my putting up a bluff about knowing French — saying "*Très bien*," and "*Voulez vous*" —

BUCKS. Now, Carney, I wouldn't be too sure —

CARNEY. Well, I am sure. That's the trouble with us — all of us. Bluff. And look what it gets you into! Look at the responsibility! Think of me with that detail. More than likely half of them know more French than I do. And they won't admit it. They'll bluff and stall, and leave it all up to me. And we'll sleep in stables for a week — stables in France! Have you tried 'em? Have you even sniffed 'em at long range?

BUCKS. I can guess what they're like.

CARNEY. Sure you can. You can guess from any village you pass through. They were cleaned out just before the battle of Waterloo, and they've been ripening ever since, just for me and my detail. And we'll come back in five days on crow-baits that can hardly haul their ragged hoofs out of the mud. Buy horses — with French money! If I bought Joe Patchen's full brother for fifty francs, that Lieutenant would growl at me. I'm the unluckiest guy —

SIMPERSON. Don't say that — didn't you get your wish?

CARNEY. Yes, and don't I wish I hadn't? I wish I was back where I was, that's what I wish.

[*Re-enter the Lieutenant.*

THE LIEUTENANT. Carney, I gave you certain orders for immediate execution. I didn't expect you to rise to your opportunity. I wasn't surprised when you didn't. The work couldn't wait, so the Major has made other arrangements. Your appointment as sergeant has been cancelled. There will be no other punishment this time, but I hope

the matter will make some impression on you, for your own good. Let me have that movement order. Good night.

[*Exit the Lieutenant.*

SIMPERSON. Now say that's coincidence, will you?

CARNEY. No, but I wi—

[*He is about to say he wishes, when Simperson puts his hand over his mouth.*

SIMPERSON. Be still now. Whatever you think you want to say, don't say it. Let's get at the facts here, if we can.

BUCKS. You won't get any facts. Take my advice, and forget all about it.

CARNEY. Or go as far as you like — it's all on me.

SIMPERSON. Be quiet now. This may be very important. There's no use wasting a great chance, just because it is a chance.

CARNEY. I'll be quiet. Spill it.

SIMPERSON. Here we are, we three in France. It's all a gamble — it's a gamble if we get home — or if we don't. And what we do here is a gamble. Well, now, here we see this shine Jim throw three sixes twice. Chance? Perhaps. But he called for them, and they came. I don't pretend to understand it, but it gets me. He singsongs some nonsense with the light out, and touches Carney for three wishes. Now we know Carney's lucky. But he wishes twice, and each time the thing happens. Always by natural means — maybe so. If he wished something unnatural, the voodoo would most likely shake him. Now the point is — he's got one more wish coming.

CARNEY. Well, I wi—

[*Again Simperson gags him.*

SIMPERSON. Now don't do anything till you hear from me. First, let's find out if Jim knows how far the voodoo'll go.

BUCKS (*incredulously*). I've known folks before trying to find out things like that.

SIMPERSON. Jim.

JIM. Yes, boss.

SIMPERSON. Would your voodoo take notice of a hypothetical question — or a hypothetical wish?

JIM. That sounds pretty good, boss, but I don't know. I ain't never tried no hypoflutical wish on her.

CARNEY. What's the use being so dead sober about it, Simp?

SIMPERSON. Because it may be mighty sober business. It might mean a lot to you, and to me, and to all of us. It might mean a lot to the A. E. F.

CARNEY. Well, if I should wi— (*He stops himself*) We'll say if I should mention — just mention — our whipping the Boches, would the voodoo take any interest?

JIM. I don't know. She wouldn't do nothin' 'cept about you yourself, Mister Carney — I know that.

CARNEY. It's for me myself, personally, this — mention, we'll call it'?

JIM. Just for yourself, personally, Mister Carney.

SIMPERSON. Now go slow, Carney. I don't know what you're thinking. It's a chance — a great chance, but it must seem to come naturally, and it must come through you alone — you son of luck.

CARNEY. Jim, can you tell me how far this voodoo'll go? What'll he do for me?

JIM. There ain't no tellin' what she'll do, boss — ain't no tellin'.

SIMPERSON. Very careful, now, Carney. Don't you so much as think of wishing anything until we get it all figured out. For, however improbable it is, it must seem to happen by natural means. That's evidently the way the thing works.

BUCKS. You boys are monkeying with a buzz saw. I warn you —

SIMPERSON. So there's no use in figuring anything too miraculous.

CARNEY. I might mention being given a commission.

SIMPERSON. Didn't I say we must avoid the miraculous?

CARNEY. Well, I tell you the Major has his eye on me.

SIMPERSON. He won't have when the Lieutenant gets through. Whatever you do — and it may be something mighty big — you must do as a private. Now I'm trying to figure out what's the biggest thing a private can get away with.

BUCKS. They say a private captured a German Major General up at Château-Thierry.

CARNEY. Well, I ain't that tender-hearted.

BUCKS. And a private of engineers set off a mine up in the Arras front that blew up a whole —

CARNEY. Yes, and where did he light? Not for me!

SIMPERSON. Well, if you'll let us work it out —

CARNEY. No, you don't. You've worked out enough to show your slant. I'm goin' to work it out now. You listen to me.

SIMPERSON. We'll listen, but see that you don't say the word "wish." See that you don't even think it.

CARNEY. Quit butting in. If there's anything in this at all, it's just as likely to be something big. Nothing's too big for a voodoo. Now here's what I'll do: first, I'll get transferred to Aviation. Nothing impossible about that. Now say I make good at the flying game. I can ride anything on four legs, and lots of these French stallions are harder to stick on than a plane. I say Aviation, because the stunt must be one that I can pull off alone. Now, here's the voodoo's chance. I get a plane. I go up. I make a landing behind the Boche lines —

SIMPERSON. Don't do that. Do you know how hard it is to crank one of those engines again, alone?

CARNEY. Leave that to me. I've got a scheme for that. Well, now, I'm over back of the Boche lines. I've got my little double-barreled machine gun. I settle quietly beside a road. It's up to the Voodoo. Now along come two large grey automobiles. I turn loose with my gun. I get everybody in the first car, including the dummy. I get everybody in the second car except one party; he's an oldish party, with a stiff left arm, and he understands English

perfectly. I invite this party over to my plane. Major General, huh! My oldish party is still under my gun, mind you. And I say to him, "Bill, get busy with that propeller — we're going up." Pretty good, no? *Très bon*, yes? You'll run this for me, will you? You'll scheme it all out, will you? If I'd let you talk, you'd be talking yet. As it is, it's as good as done. Lordy, I'm dry — I wish I had a drink.

[*Jim instantly sets three mugs on the table.*

JIM. Here you are, Mister Carney. You was wishin' for a drink.

[*Carney starts violently, seeing what he has done. The other two see it also, and rise abruptly, their mugs in their hands.*

SIMPERSON. You damn fool!

BUCKS (*at the same time with Simperson*). Carney!

[*Both swing their mugs at his head; Carney ducks, and is drenched with drinks and broken earthenware, as —*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

IN FRONT OF POTTER'S

FRANK G. TOMPKINS

Frank G. Tompkins was born at Litchfield, Michigan, October 30, 1879. He graduated from the University of Michigan and became a teacher of rhetoric. Later he left to become head of the Department of English in the Detroit Junior College. His only published play is "Sham." A volume of his plays will be issued this year by Stewart Kidd Company.

IN FRONT OF POTTER'S

A PLAY

By FRANK G. TOMPKINS

Characters

PROFESSOR GAGE
THE OTHER
GEORGE

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IN FRONT OF POTTER'S

Two o'clock, a rainy spring night on the main street of a small college town. The background is the dimly lighted window of Potter's Restaurant, rain-streaked. The glass is so filmed with wet that nothing within can be seen; only a square yellow haze with "Potter's" in blurred letters across it. Two men with umbrellas held low before their faces run into each other near the lighted space. Both start back apologetically. So far as can be seen in the dim light, they are of the same height and general build, but one of them is frailer, more nervous in his movements, and his voice is a little strained and tired; the other is heavier, stronger, with quiet movements and a more vibrant voice.

PROFESSOR GAGE (*the tired one*). I *beg* your pardon. Any damage done? Did I hurt you? I was charging along like a mad bull. Forgot there were other people in the world. I *did* wreck your umbrella, didn't I?

THE OTHER. Nothing much. An old one.

[*He holds it away from the light.*

GAGE. I want to make it right. I shouldn't have been —

OTHER. Not at all. I was doing the same thing. A bent rib, that's all. (*They step into the fuller light to examine the umbrella, but this turns their faces away so that their figures are seen in silhouette*) Don't think of it. Hope I didn't hurt *you!* There's a scratch on — Why —

[*His voice trails off in astonishment and they are left staring into each others' faces.*

GAGE. Oh! (*It is hardly more than a long-drawn breath of wonder. Involuntarily he falls back, then recovers himself and tries to speak naturally*) Nonsense! For just a moment — I thought — I thought you looked like me! (*The words are spoken at times in halting groups, then in a quick rush*) It's the light, I think. A fellow never knows how

he looks himself. Funny, isn't it? But I fancied — just for a moment I fancied — (*His voice dies out; he stares for a moment and then in a changed tone*) Would you mind if I asked your name? It's uncanny! Do *you* think we look alike?

OTHER. Remarkably alike.

GAGE. Why — It seems to me we do. I can't believe it. Coincidence, I suppose. One ought to be used to that, but this — is unusual. (*With an apologetic laugh*) I could almost shave by looking at you. But you're stockier, heavier, more color, better looking, I guess. You certainly look as I might if — that is — if — (*swiftly again*) It isn't just that you look like me; you look like all the Burtons — my mother's people. You must be a Burton — but there isn't one for you to be.

OTHER. Gage is my name, Roscoe Gage.

GAGE (*it is a cry of protest*). No, not Gage! That's my name, Roscoe Gage! I teach here in the University. What's the trick? Oh, I don't understand. I'm rather shaken. (*He puts one hand toward the wall for the support of something solid*) If I talk nonsense, will you please — pull me up? But — you don't just *look* like me; it's worse — you *are* me! That's not grammar — nor sense, is it? Oh, it's the night. There's something wrong with it. Pshaw! (*He turns away*) This isn't good! Excuse me. If you won't let me pay for your umbrella, I'd better get back to my rooms. Good night!

OTHER (*detaining him with a touch*). Wait!

GAGE. Don't, please! (*He tries to shake off the hand, but it is not withdrawn*) You must excuse me. Something's gone wrong — up here (*he puts his hand to his head*). Let me go! If you're somebody — somebody else — I don't want to be seen like this. Can't you let a man alone — hide until he's right again? Don't shame me. I'll be right if I can get by myself. You can't help. Let me go, please let me go! Whoever you are —

OTHER. Steady now! You're all right. Don't get panicky.

Look here. Face the thing. You said it, you know! I'm you, too. Calm down and hang on to yourself. You understand these things; you've studied and read.

GAGE. You — are — myself! Then I'm mad — gone —

OTHER. No, no, nothing of the sort! Listen. Something in the work you've been doing, something in the night brought this about. We're both you, but we've got separated somehow.

GAGE. Separated? Dissociated personality, that's what they call it. Then I'm through! They'll ask questions and questions and questions, and whatever I answer it will give me away. And if I don't answer, that'll give me away. You're helpless, there's no hiding your mind. God! This is the end of me! (*Fiercely*) Can't I strangle you? Can't I — bribe you to go away?

OTHER. No. Pull yourself together. Don't go on like this or somebody'll come along and drag you off to the asylum. You've got to do the thinking. I can't. You're strong on that, you're trained to it. I'm you — part of you — you know about such things. You read enough. You know there's no danger. You see what's happened — you named it yourself. Don't be afraid. Let's talk while it lasts. Come on back to the rooms —

GAGE. Never! Not to my rooms. If I once let you in, I'd never have a refuge left — a place to hide. Never! You come in here. Pretend to eat. I was coming here when we met. I can't sleep after I've studied too many hours unless I walk and eat. No, we can't go in and face the light. Old man Potter would see us. That would mean — discovery.

OTHER. Just stand out of the light, until you collect yourself. Nobody will pass at two o'clock on such a raw night.

GAGE. Except Schwartz, the policeman. It's his beat.

OTHER. That's safe. You know him. Speak to him first. He'll pass on because he knows you. Now, what did you say had happened?

GAGE. Dissociated personality. You're the part of me that

I've trained to keep under — some part that I've subdued — put down.

OTHER. That's it. Put down, that's me.

GAGE. Not the me that teaches classes. Not the me that's engaged to Margaret. That's ended. I can't risk that for her. Maybe — I think — you're what I might have been if —

OTHER. Now you're on. What you might have been. What you could still be. The fact that I'm here proves that. You've kept me down, smothered me out, but I'm here just the same. You haven't killed me.

GAGE. No, I see. You're still alive. Then if I gave you a chance — suppressed myself — this me — I'd be you. Oh! it's suicide, whichever way you put it.

OTHER. No, it's a choice. Something separated us to-night — gave me my chance. What was it? You've been uppermost for years. You've kept me down — chained — but I've always been there, waiting my chance. Something happened. What was it?

GAGE. You don't know? What does it matter? I don't.

OTHER. I'm not the thinker. That's you. I only want to live — but we both go down in a wreck if you don't think this out. If you don't reconcile us, save us somehow, we're mad.

GAGE. I want to live too. I don't want to be you. Can't we both live as we always have?

OTHER. Not if I can help it. I want more life — conscious life. I won't always be defeated — beaten down. My way is always blocked, my desires denied — I won't have that again —

GAGE. Do I do that?

OTHER. Yes, you do. When I grope for expression — for light, I meet you in the dark passages of the brain, and you always block me — frustrate me. Something let me out to-night. I've been coming to it for days. Now I've got strength to stand away from you. I'll keep my chance, or I'll wreck us both. I'm stronger now. If I let you go

home, when morning comes, you'll be stronger. No. You stay here. I have more passion than you, but you're too clever, too trained for me. When you're asleep —

GAGE. Pray God I'm asleep now! I'll wake up with the sun in my window —

OTHER. You're here, on State Street, in front of Potter's. It's two o'clock in the morning. You'll settle this here if you're ever to go back to your old room — your old life — your books — your classes. Think what started it —

GAGE. First I must know what you're like. What do you want of me?

OTHER. I want — things different — as they used to be. I can remember moments that were mine. Long ago. There were more of them then. Here's one. Remember when we were small? I was your equal then; often I won. We went to a circus with grandfather. That night we crept down the back stairs, shoes and stockings in hand, clothes wrapped up in an old shirt, a washline for a slack rope. I wanted —

GAGE. I know. We were running away to join the circus. You're wasting time. That's too trivial —

OTHER. Not to me. What happened then?

GAGE. Mother met me on the stairs. She'd heard the creaking of a step. I didn't get beyond the kitchen door.

OTHER. No. She helped you put me under then. She was terribly strong —

GAGE. Strong? No, Mother was weak and helpless. That's why I gave in. We sat on the steps for hours in the dark, and Mother cried, and at last I cried. She put her arm around my shoulder and — I sobbed while she told me how she would suffer if I ran away. She said she was only a woman; life is harder with women. She hadn't ever been very happy and it's a man's place to shield women. I can hear her voice as she talked softly, and see the garden in the moonlight. Strange how clear it is. I've never been unkind to a woman — since — never. Mother woke up something in me to take care of that — always. — Mother —

OTHER. Yes — Mother! She fought for you. It wasn't right. She wanted you to be like her because she couldn't understand anything else. It's wrong. She had the terrible strength of weakness and she used it on a little boy —

GAGE. I know. Later she didn't even have to speak. I could always feel her wish. But let's not put it off on her. There's *always* been something wrong. I've wanted to be you — more like you, often. But I couldn't give up being myself. I can't now — anything of me.

OTHER. You can't?

GAGE (*with sudden alterations of mood from hysteria to calm*). I wish I could. I'm what I am to please Mother — to make life easier for her. I suppressed whatever threatened her peace and happiness — that's you. But it's come to please me — to be me. It's the easier way now. I can't give up anything. I can't change. (*It is a cry*) But that's the instinctive cry of weakness — I can rise above that. I've built strong walls. I've got to tear them down and free you and I'm afraid, terribly afraid. Man, you've got to be worth it. No, I won't. Why should I after all these years? I'm the self that I know, that I can trust, that I'm at home with, that fits my easy chair, my room, my books and pictures. It's my life and it's as I want it — ease and leisure and calm and culture. I won't give it up! (*More calmly*) At least, I won't give it up for nothing. Who are you? Maybe you're my worst self.

OTHER. Grasping at excuses?

GAGE (*in a tired voice*). Excuses, yes. You're the man the earth has wanted from the beginning. I'm the one it doesn't want. Yes, I was trying to sneak out. I can't be fair. You aren't evil. You're more primitive, but it's not a question of morals. (*Hopefully*) Then what difference does it make so long as I'm happy. It isn't right or wrong. I'll stay as I am.

OTHER. Are you happy?

GAGE. Good God, no! I was — at peace, at least — not

unhappy until you came — I'd stopped caring until Margaret — Let's leave her out of this.

OTHER. We can't.

GAGE. Mother had no right! No, I don't mean that. But Mother made me over for herself until no other woman would want me, or ever be quite satisfied. Look here, *are* you worth it? You ran away with a circus. That's one of the things I've been denied, daring, adventure, aggressiveness, knockabout, rough and tumble, soil for the hands and the soul. I hate it too; I fear it. Crude passion, I'm afraid of it; I love calm and control and fastidiousness and delicacy. The other things make me cringe. What else did you do? I've got to find out whether you're the self I lack. Tell me everything you remember.

OTHER. It's not much. You'll call it trivial. But it's all there is. Little things. There was the circus. And I learned to swim.

GAGE. I remember. . . . That was one of the great battles. How I longed to be allowed that. To swim and dive. Swimming was too dangerous. There were swift eddies and deep holes. And there was Mother's grief if I should be brought home drowned. That would have killed her; the risk was too great. To this day I hate great bodies of water. And the swimming hole was immodest. Funny, I'm still modest, are you?

OTHER. Never think of it, one way or the other.

GAGE. The fellows at the swimming hole were pretty rough. Good-for-nothing, from the lower town. The talk was rare and racy and sophisticated. You listened to it?

OTHER. I talked that way too.

GAGE. Dirty, it all was! I didn't, you know. I'm pretty fastidious in my speech, I guess. I don't listen to stories about women, ever. You tell them?

OTHER. Yes.

GAGE. That's coarse-grained. I can't accept that.

OTHER (*shrugs*). I don't insist. I played football, and there was track.

GAGE. And I was afraid, physically afraid. I can't stand hurts — in others either. I want things smooth and whole. And then I hate competition. Somebody loses. I hate victory worse than defeat.

OTHER. I like struggle — win or lose. I boxed. Tried to be professional. Couldn't make the grade. Bruised ear — cauliflower. Don't want to see it, do you? But the muscles of my back are — muscles. I can take care of myself — or a woman. Can you?

GAGE. Don't! No, I can't.

OTHER. I've known all kinds of men and women. I saw life — not pretty pictures. Seen some bad things. You've read about them — some of them — I've tramped. I've gone across on cattle boats. Bummed my way. Been in scrapes. There's something primitive in youth — should be.

GAGE. It's beastly, it's common.

OTHER (*with disdain*). I don't use the word "common." It's living.

GAGE. Well, then, it's damned coarse.

OTHER. Is it? Living's coarse, then. It isn't washed out, mollycoddle, pale, nice.

GAGE. That's what Margaret thinks — sometimes. But look here, — you never did these things. You've never had an actual life of your own.

OTHER (*sadly*). Dreams! All you left me. But dreams are a part of you.

GAGE. Margaret wishes sometimes — I can see the look in her eyes — It's Margaret that started this! (*With surprise*) That's it. Margaret set me thinking — wishing — she roused you. Something she missed in me more and more. She'd like me to knock a man down for her — or to want to — or to be able to — for her. Mother wanted me to dodge — for her. I see now. Mother spoiled me for Margaret. One's mother is the enemy of one's love. If Mother could only have released the grip of those tender fingers — a little. It grows worse and worse, the more I see Margaret.

OTHER. She loves you? — or is it me?

GAGE (*passionately*). Me! She loves me! But I puzzle her. She doesn't find in me something she needs — something she expected. I ought to be more like you. At first she liked my way of thinking things out, my way of talking. I play with subjects — quaint, whimsical, they call it. It's a good line. It amuses people. I like it too. I can't change that. It's the very color of my mind. Have you got that?

OTHER. Don't want it. Say straight out what you mean. That's what gets somewhere. Don't fiddle with it, I say. Sure Margaret likes that?

GAGE. No, she did. It palls now. But it's ingrained in me. Years of habit. I hate to give that up. It's hard. Do you like poetry and art and all that? These things are the breath of life to me.

OTHER. I like 'em, but living is more important. I like better to match myself against some other man — against things, obstacles. I trust myself. If I'm beaten, I'm still there. And there was the fight.

GAGE. I cringe. I'm afraid. Margaret begins to see it. She despises it. It's Margaret that's helping you. She is looking for you — in me. I'm what Mother needed. You're what Margaret wants. But do you know — (*wonderingly*) she'd make her son like me — safe —

OTHER. Not if I'm his father. You think I'm too crude for her?

GAGE (*hopefully*). Maybe! Maybe she'd rather have me, after all. No, that isn't true. The lack of you is making her unhappy, restless. It can't go on — to grow worse when we're married. Margaret has got to have you. You'll make her unhappy too, but you'll satisfy a deeper need. There's more life in it. And life is what we want. She has a right to the happiness and unhappiness you'd bring her. That's settled. (*Firmly*) We won't go back on that. I'm man enough to face it and stand up to it. You've won. I give up. We start from there. But, God!

man, do you know what it means to me? Physical death is nothing. You never believe that the real you dies, but this is the real me. I am deliberately going to blot it out — myself — my soul. (*He pauses to think what it means*) You'll sit in my easy chair at home. All the little familiar things I love will be yours — the life I love. How differently you'll do it all! In class you'll never take up a subject and light it with — play, and turn it about and color it. A few kindred souls will miss me, — but most of them will understand you better. Margaret will miss me, but you'll give her a fuller, intenser life. I'm no good. I'm just going to cease to be — to gutter out. One of us goes back to the big chair by the lamp where I've spent so many glorious nights in a dream world of ideas — the other goes out into space. Annihilated! But it's you for the chair and the lamp and Margaret; me for — the other road.

OTHER. Look here, aren't you getting sacrificial, unnecessarily? I don't want to cheat you if annihilation thrills you. But you're getting it too cheap. I go back to your chair and your lamp and Margaret, our Margaret, because I'm what's wanted. But you aren't quite going out. A personality can't be killed like that, you said so. You'll be there just as I've been all these years, but I'll have the upper hand. I'm boss; you promise it, you will it. But I'll have to act through the paths you've established. I can't slough you off. It's just a change of masters. You are going to fade, but you aren't going out. Here's the policeman. Speak to him before he speaks to us.

GAGE. I know, it's safer. Hello, George! Rotten night, isn't it?

GEORGE. Rotten it is, sir. Oh, it's Mr. Gage, isn't it?

GAGE. Yes, it's Gage. We came up to Potter's for a glass of milk and a sandwich before turning in. But the old man has fallen asleep and we won't disturb him.

GEORGE. We? Are you seein' double, sir? I guess I'll run in and tell old Potter to put out his lights and go to bed.

GAGE. He saw only one of us. I hadn't thought of that. You're safe. Good-by! (*He takes the Other's hand and holds it firmly*) You go along with George. He won't notice anything strange about you. I'll stay here — until — later — until we're one. You know the room, where the tobacco is. I suppose, when you're asleep I shall come slinking, creeping in. Because, as you said, I can't die and you're all I've got to live with. Good night.

GEORGE (*reënters in the darkness*). Are ye goin' my way, Mr. Gage?

OTHER. Yes, I'll walk as far as the room with you. (*Turning. There is a pause, another handclasp, while George waits with his back turned*) I'll be turning in or I sha'n't be up much for an eight o'clock, shall I?

[*They are vaguely seen as two figures walking off together.*

GEORGE. Have ye got a cold, sir? Ye're voice sounds funny-like. And ye're all bundled up too. Better be careful. A night like this is the worst kind.

OTHER. It's a queer night, isn't it?

GEORGE. Ye never can tell what'll happen a night like this. I remember once —

[*His voice dies out in the distance.*

After a moment the blue light of morning creeps in just enough to show a crumpled figure on the pavement huddled up against the front of the store.

CURTAIN

BIBLIOGRAPHIES

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A LITTLE THEATRE WORKING LIBRARY

[Instead of the conventional bibliography the Editor feels that a selected list of books which will best serve the interests of the little theatre is more desirable. More complete lists of books about the theatre and plays will be found in the list of bibliographies appended. Most anthologies carry more or less extended listings of plays.]

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